

TWENTY-FIVE
YEARS
OF FILMS

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WILLIAM FRIESE-GREENE
1855—1921.

Twenty-Five Years of Films

Reminiscences and Reflections of a Critic

by
G. R. DOYLE

WITH A FOREWORD BY ALEXANDER KORDA

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TO VERA

FOREWORD

“THE first duty of the film is entertainment,” writes Mr. Doyle in this somewhat unusual book—half-serious, half-satirical but wholly observant. Now even those responsible for film-making should know this, quite apart from a writer whose insight is evidently not hampered by such association, and whose viewpoint is independently aloof.

But the curious thing about entertainment is that
plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

The audiences of 1936, watching Mr. Chaplin's *Modern Times*, enjoy the hero's ill-timed dive into a shallow pond, laughing as unrestrainedly as we laughed at the same “gag” in the comedies of 1911 and 1912. On the other hand, the recent exhumation of an old film *Feud in the Kentucky Hills*, a seriously-meant drama, was received with giggles; and yet its theme is surely strong enough to last for generations from now.

Probably the audience felt that they were expected to laugh, or else they were tickled by a touch of yesterday in the technique. Treatment, we know, frequently dispenses with story proper; frequently enhances or nullifies it.

A picture is not doomed to failure merely because it has costume or a historical setting, and we should remember that more humane recent legislation has made it a less punishable crime to assist the public to think.

I endorse many of the bold expressions of view in “Twenty-five Years of Films” (which might almost claim to be called “Forty Years of Films”). For its careful

survey of the manner in which treatment has varied, while story has remained unchanged; for its scathing indictment of the industry's many abuses; for its freedom from prig-gishness and from the words *avant-garde* and *montage*, I commend it to the serious reader, or even to the flippant fellow who holds that the first duty of a book is—to entertain.

London, W.I.

A. KORDA

March, 1936.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION.

A GOOD many books on films have already appeared; but the theme is so extensive and continually expanding, so absorbing in its many-sided fascination, that any author of a fresh contribution is justified in believing that he can present interesting facts and arguments on the subject without in any way borrowing from his predecessors. Moreover, American books of this kind are practically invariably national in scope and outlook (and the detailed records of their film finance are of questionable appeal to others); French and German books are seldom for the general reader, and the average English offering takes an unnecessarily restricted and gloomy view, I consider, and is uncompromising so far as British films are concerned.

The film has unquestionably come and conquered, and we may as well take things as we find them, without being priggish, even if we can suggest improvements. Like the man who had known Big Ben since it was a wrist-watch, I have seen the films grow up, though not necessarily to years of discretion, and think I can claim some familiarity with the subject. I fancy also that I shall be acquitted of the slightest national bias. It is true that I have for some years represented an American film magazine, but this preface is written from Clerkenwell, the source of the first cinematograph apparatus patented in the world: I was born in neither Europe nor the United States, and have lived and travelled in eleven countries. And so I need hardly apologise for sharing my experiences and memories of the films I have seen, from the time of the *Great Train Robbery* onwards, being assured that they will interest another and much larger audience than those who have already been kind enough to say they found them entertaining. To these anecdotes I have thought it desirable to add a few notes on the nature and principles of cinematography, which I hope will be helpful, and not too tedious.

I have little patience with the Star System, which is detrimental to the quality of pictures; but here again we must be tolerant, for memories of films undoubtedly evoke memories of players.

I have therefore made occasional compromises in this direction, and trust that on the strength of them I shall be excused from retailing the more or less veracious anecdotes of players' private and professional lives.

Judged with reference to present-day standards and practices, certain of the chapters may appear to have a somewhat out-of-date flavour, or to treat of abuses which are now less marked; but I imagine this will not be held to detract from my survey of a long period.

London, E.C.

November, 1935.

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Conventional Terms and Abbreviations.

H.M.—“History of the Movies.”

F.T.N.—“The Film till Now.”

L.G.P.—“Let’s Go to the Pictures.”

Pur.—“A Voyage to Purulia.”

“Cinématographe” suggests an accepted dictionary word, but is actually a proprietary name, in which respect it resembles the world-famous trademarks *gramophone*, *cellophane*, *tabloid*, *petrol* and *kodak*.

Stock—the sensitized raw film.

Frame—each section of negative framed by the camera “gate” or shutter aperture, and made into a separate little picture three-quarters of an inch in height.

Shot, shooting—supposed to have been suggested by the fancied resemblance of the Bell-Howell Camera to a machine-gun, but much more probably derived from “snapshot,” derived again from “sharp-shooting.”

Subject—in the concrete, the trade name for a completed story film. In the abstract, a theme.

Reel—conventional unit of about 1,000 feet of positive film.

Movie, speaky—former terms to distinguish between (silent) film and stage play.

Fans—baseball enthusiasts. During a match, they would wave streamers and paper fans printed in the colours of their favourites.

Ardent devotees or “fanatics” of other sports.

Fan mail—Stars’ correspondence from admirers.

Screen—in the abstract—the realm of cinema. Otherwise, a white or silvery surface, opaque but perforated in ordinary sound-film equipment; solid but translucent for rear projection.

Cameraman—official in charge of photography and lighting—not necessarily the actual operator.

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PRELIMINARY PLATITUDES.

1. *The Moving Picture.*

"When one object shall rapidly supplant another, the sight of the first object shall be retained."—Lucretius.

It is too late now to hope for revenge upon the person or persons originally responsible for the movies. As the cynical husband retorted when the young wife proposed an extra-special dinner for their wedding anniversary: "Why kill a turkey, for what happened three years ago?"

We are considering *Twenty-Five Years of Films*, however, and in case some are lucky enough not to know what films are, and others possibly have forgotten what were the first symptoms of the present state of affairs, it may not be out of place to quote a few well-worn axioms on the subject. Just a brief glance will be enough, as the enquiring reader can find the history of cinematograph mechanisms very thoroughly traced in Mr. Wilfred Day's excellent if cumbrously-titled "*Twenty-Five Thousand Years to Trap a Shadow.*"

In many quarters it is held that the Plague of 1665 was caused by a cargo of skins from abroad. The Indian Mutiny may possibly have sprung from the injudicious use of animal fat; the Great Fire of Chicago through a moment's carelessness—who can say? The precise origin of the cinema must remain—like the proof of paternity under French law—a matter of conjecture. With the kindest of altruistic motives, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* gives complete credit to the United States, and supplies an excellent collection of film photographs, of which only one is not American.

This view appears to be endorsed by the Americans themselves, among whose writings we shall not find ourselves wearied with incessant references to Lumière or Friese-Greene, Marey or Robert Paul. Nevertheless, the conscientious searcher after knowledge will conclude that

cinematography is a monopoly of the United States in the sole sense that "The Last Rose of Summer" is an Italian song from the opera "Martha."

It appears that in 1824, Dr. P. M. Roget (whose kindly foresight we have to thank for the "Thesaurus," so useful for crossword puzzles), watching the progress of a cart as seen through the slats of his venetian blind, observed a curious phenomenon, which he communicated to the Royal Society in a paper on "Persistence of Vision." Let us skip 110 years, and we shall see the significance of this. We are at a film show, and, perhaps during a hopeful wait for something intelligent to appear on the screen, we make the following experiment:—

The hand, with fingers separated, is waved fairly quickly from side to side, the palm parallel with the floor and perhaps six inches higher than the lap of the observer, who gazes about half-way between the hand and the bottom of the screen. The picture is absolutely steady, and there is apparently no flicker in the bright beam of light coming from the operator's window; but now, as one finger changes places with another, in time with the actual though imperceptible flashing of the shutter, a flickering effect becomes suddenly noticeable, and in this way an expert can judge the speed at which the projector is working. We cannot go into scientific details here, but this principle of timed substitution, together with the circumstance that the human eye cannot separately distinguish more than twelve images per second, is the basis of the "animated pictures" illusion.

Such pictures were an accomplished fact by 1830, and were projected on to a screen in 1853, by the Baron von Uchatius. The Zoetrope, in which we look through a revolving slotted cylinder, to see a figure on the inside rim apparently moving, is very aptly described by *Chambers's Encyclopaedia* as "an illusion of theoretical motion."

The illusion of real motion is thence reached by two easy

stages, but farther than that, up to the present time, it is not possible to go. Fox Talbot, in his original patent specification for photography, of about 1840, anticipated being able to adapt the process to give a true picture of objects in motion, but it is most important to remember that this has never yet been accomplished.

The first stage beyond the artificial Zoetrope picture was the exhibition of animated real photographs by Heyl's phasmatrope. A dancing couple had obligingly posed before the camera in eighteen separate positions, roughly taken as representing the component movements of the waltz. The separate still pictures were linked together by the Phasmatrope, and gave a startlingly vivid effect of continuous movement. This important demonstration was made at the American Academy of Music, Philadelphia, on the 5th February, 1870. The second stage was an interesting variation of the former experiment, conducted by a Mr. Muybridge, of Kingston-on-Thames. Mr. Muybridge's Christian name was Eadweard, but he was also notable for having made it clear, by photography, that a trotting horse raised all four feet from the ground simultaneously.

The experimental work was done in California, between 1872 and 1877, and the final results were convincing, although the method was cumbrous, involving a whole fleet of cameras, each taking a single picture as the horse passed it.

So much for animated pictures, which must be held to include the film cartoon. We now come to the cinematograph, which gives precisely the same effect, but with less photographic labour. The problem was to devise a system employing one single camera which would take an endless succession of pictures of both stationary and moving objects, and a magic-lantern apparatus to shew the same sequence of views upon a screen. To give the life-like appearance of smooth motion, it would again be necessary for the

working speed to be at least twelve pictures per second, and as the reader will easily appreciate, the light must be shut off for a fraction of time during the actual changing of every picture (otherwise there would be a meaningless blur).

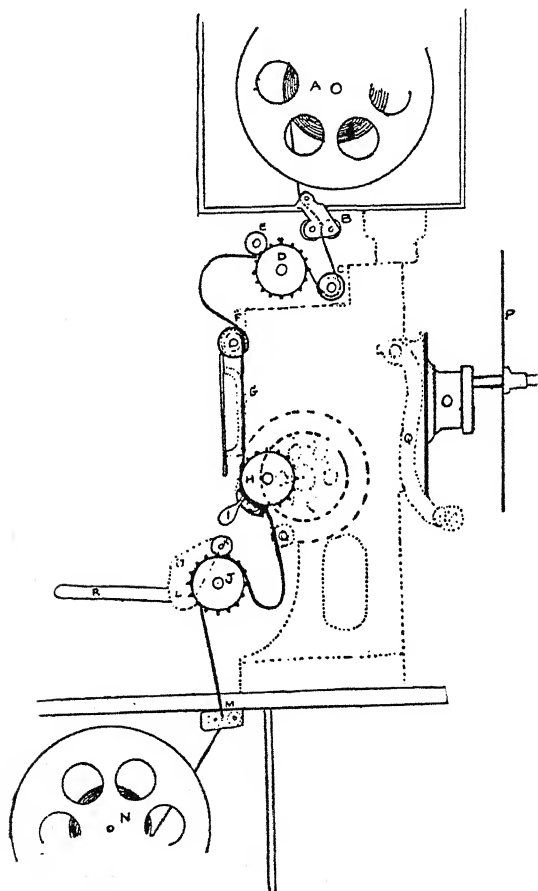
All this was accomplished by William Friese-Greene in 1885, in accordance with his British patent for Kinematography dating from the 21st June, 1889. The first cine-camera was manufactured to his design in 1887, the year in which celluloid film was introduced.

In October, 1889, the late Thomas A. Edison produced his kinetoscope, and also made a talking picture, but when the kinetoscope (a one-man peep-show) was shewn to the public in April, 1894, it was already doomed, and the new English invention was being rapidly developed by Lumière in France and by Robert W. Paul in England.

The reader who has indulgently suffered these preliminary remarks will be in a position to appreciate the arguments developed at a later stage in this book, as to the purely artificial and illusory nature of the cinema process. Further technical details, as I have suggested, are readily available elsewhere, in works such as Mr. F. A. Talbot's "Moving Pictures". I will, however, mention two early mechanical difficulties, and the remarkably resourceful methods of overcoming them. As in most cases of successful engineering, we are divided between admiration of the inventive genius and astonishment at the extreme simplicity of the device.

Early attempts at film exhibiting were handicapped by an incessant flicker which was most tiring, and by a chronic tendency for the celluloid to snap in the "gate" behind the projector lens. In addition to geared machinery for gradually uncoiling a reel of film, it was necessary to provide for the instantaneous jerking of a frame into position during the momentary closing of the shutter, and

the strain of this, against a dead-weight resistance of anything more than 50 feet of uncoiled film, incessantly resulted in breakage. The illustration of the Latham loop shews the absurd simplicity of the solution to this difficulty.



PROJECTOR MECHANISM.—The film is simultaneously uncoiled at D, H and J, and although it moves in little jerks across G, any strain is absorbed by the slack loops.

Again, the maximum limit of about twelve images per second, which the human eye is able to separate, does not apply to mere flashes of white light, which do not merge into an appearance of steadiness until the number per second is increased to forty. The Lumières (appropriate name!) had found that the ideal projection speed was sixteen per second, which made a steady picture; but, of course the projector-beam flicker was still in evidence, and in fact a sure source of headache. Then some clever devil, instead of worrying about the speed of the film-strip, thought of the homeopathic cure of deliberately increasing the flashes of light to 48 per second, by substituting a three-bladed fan for the former plain shutter! So simple! As the Americans would say: "It's like taking candy from a kid."

2. *The Film as a Spectacle.*

For reasons not entirely satisfactorily explained, the cinema film is unsuitable for making a photo print on paper—even a small one. On the other hand, when used in motion, and projected on to a good screen, it can and does produce a bright image of as much as 42 feet in length—a magnification of a quarter of a million. Edison's kinetoscope could be viewed by only one person at a time. So was it with the Mutoscope, a peep-show which, if you inserted a penny and turned a handle, shewed you a pack of photo cards which flipped into position so smartly that one got the illusion of "living pictures." But there were wonderful and obvious possibilities of mass entertainment in the new discovery, which became affectionately known to the public by little pet nick-names like Phenakistiscope, Heliocineographe, Zoopraxinoscope

An interesting machine made by Muybridge had been shewn at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, but according to my information the first genuine cinematograph performance in the world was given by the Lumières at Lyons, on the 22nd March, 1895. Hence this famous firm's

ESSENCE OF CINEMA TRADITION



(Below) CECIL B. DE MILLE, D. W. GRIFFITH AND JEANIE
MACPHERSON.

address: 25 Rue du Premier Film. The French lanterns made by Lumière Frères and by Léon Gaumont became world-famous, and, in fact, the whole American industry was founded upon the "cinématographe." Robert W. Paul, also, had an excellent projector, in which he had introduced the Maltese Cross Movement, and in 1895 he perfected his camera. Before that, the Edison camera was the only reliable one in existence. Thomas Armat's projector, advertised with questionable justification as "Edison's Vitascope," was shewn at the Cotton States Exposition, Atlanta, Georgia, in September, 1895, and at Koster and Bial's Music Hall, Herald Square, New York, on the 23rd April, 1896, including two Lumière films of "Mammy washing her Child" and "Gardener playing the Hose."

As to Germany, I have no exact information, but England was somewhat behindhand in this matter, having nothing to shew to the general public (if we except an exhibition of apparatus at Earl's Court in 1895) until the 20th February, 1896, on which day two rival performances claimed the attention of Londoners. Félicien Trewéy, manager to the Lumière Brothers, demonstrated the Cinématographe at the Polytechnic, Regent Street, shewing little topical views such as Conjuring Tricks, Changing the Guard, Firemen Called Out; and, two miles away, "Bobby" Paul was churning his Theatograph at the Finsbury Technical College, with an exciting programme of pre-release features, e.g. "Shoe-Black at Work in a London Street" and "Rough Sea at Dover."

The following month saw the appearance of the first public cinema theatre in the world, when a part of Olympia, West Kensington, was taken for films. In 1901 a definite picture theatre was opened in Bishopsgate, London, and in March, 1902, Thomas L. Tally started things in America with his Electric Theatre at Los Angeles. The rage then spread so quickly that by June, 1905, the small

town of McKeesport, Pennsylvania, had a "nickelodeon" with a continuous daily programme of films from 8 a.m. till mid-night! In the interim, however, films were shewn as a novelty at various music-halls and similar establishments in Europe and America, and notably a four-years' contract was secured, starting on the 25th March, 1896, for the shewing of Paul's re-christened "Animatograph" at a London music-hall which affected a Moorish style, and was designated El Hambra (or "The Alhambra"). But in France the cinema was smarting under the disgrace of the Charity Bazaar catastrophe, and the writer did not encounter films there until, in 1902, they were exhibited as a curiosity in hôtel drawing-rooms.

3. *The Earliest Films.*

In the world's first motor-race, held in 1894, the professed object was to cover the distance between Paris and Rouen in the shortest time. In practice, however, considerable excitement and admiration would be caused by any vehicle which "went" at all, and the ultimate ambition to rival the speed of pedestrians—and their reliability—could well be left to the unfolding of later years of progress.

Bioscope patrons of the nineties, provided they could witness so novel and inspiring an exhibition as a living picture which would endure for 60 or 90 seconds without a breakdown, were not likely to be otherwise critical as to the nature or quality of the programme, and it is not surprising to learn that in the early years little more than the simplest topical scenes were attempted. The Oxford and Cambridge Boat-race had been filmed in 1895, and the film entertainment at El Hambra must have included many similar scenes. The Derby of 1896, for instance, was shewn there on the day after the race, and perhaps this was the first "Topical Exclusive" to be presented before the public.

The first full-length one, however, must surely have been of a boxing match in America. James J. Corbett claimed to be the first film actor, as he had appeared in front of the camera in 1893 (for the Kinetoscope, I presume), and his big fight with Fitzsimmons in 1897 was the subject of an 11,000-foot film made by Enoch Rector at Carson City, Nevada. The following year an astute showman, perhaps in questionable taste, presented a three-reel film which purported to reproduce the Passion Play, but was actually made in New York.

Studios now appeared in various parts of the world, in rivalry to the Kinetoscope Company's laboratory at Orange, New Jersey. Paul set up at New Southgate, Middlesex; Méliès in Paris; Colonel Selig in Chicago; Williamson at Hove, Sussex. Whereas if Edison had taken a serious interest in cinematography proper, the United States must immediately have dominated the market, it is curious to note that the Hove studios alone were kept busy for four years, supplying about 3,500 films annually for American and Continental use.

The first film play would seem to have been "The Soldier's Courtship," 40 feet in length, made on the roof of El Hambra in 1896, and the first story film, "A Fire on a Liner at Sea," made for the same London music-hall by Russell Vokes in the P. & O. liner, *Carthage*, also in 1896—a coherent story, complete with last-minute rescue. America eventually made her own film stories, of which an early example was "Avenging a Crime; or Burned at the Stake" (585 feet), in 1902. The first story masterpiece was, of course, "The Great Train Robbery" (1903).

PART ONE

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

THE STORY AND ITS FILM TREATMENT.

What Has Gone Before.

- 1830. Stampfer, of Vienna, makes "Stroboscope" based on Roget effect.
- ca.1840. Patents for Photography—Daguerre, Niepce, Fox Talbot.
- 1861. du Maurois gives specification of moving pictures.
- 1870. Heyl's Phasmatrope.
- 1872-77. Muybridge-Stanford-Isaacs experiments at Palo Alto Stock Farm, California.
- 1887. Hannibal Goodwin invents celluloid film. Cine-camera made by Chipperfield, of Clerkenwell.
- 1889. The first patent for cinematography. Hyde Park scene filmed on celluloid by the late William Friese-Greene. Edison makes a talking picture.
- 1895. Exhibition of films at Lyons.
- 1896. "A Fire on a Liner at Sea." News film of horse-race at Epsom, Surrey.
- 1897. Remarkable camera-craft in "Trip to the Moon" (Méliès, Paris).
- 1902. Gilbert and Sullivan filmed with speech and music.
- 1903. Edwin Porter's "The Great Train Robbery" starts vogue for picture theatres.
- 1907. Mr. Griffith discovers correct principles of film-making.

(Now read on).

1. *The Destiny of the Film.*

As can be gathered from the above time-saving synopsis, and as has been traced in greater detail in the preceding

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chapter, the cinema had grown, by about the year 1903, from novel diversion to stable entertainment. This naturally called for imagination and inventiveness in the matter of the scenes presented before the camera lens, for obviously the public would not indefinitely support a display consisting solely of the tritest "topical" views, when once the mechanical novelty had worn off.

Similarly, the stage is admittedly a mirror held to nature, but the mirror is not optically true, and its entertainment possibilities are derived from our remembering that the public do not go to the theatre to see that same slice of life which is freely on view outside. We exercise, at the least, a very careful discrimination in the scenes depicted, and deem that a certain amount of embellishment is justified; for did not Oscar Wilde shrewdly decide that "Nature is but a poor imitation of Art"? "To love nature is to love Kean" had been the tribute to that great actor; or we might substitute (for instance) "... to love Turner," quite undeterred by the fact that no-one in normal health, without the co-operation of alcohol, would see a sky such as he painted. "No, Madam, but don't you wish you could?" he is said to have retorted to a critic.

Again, to pass from embellishment to mere judicious selection, let us take Hoppner's charming portrait "The Misses Frankland." Here we have two exceedingly pretty girls seated in a garden. All very well, but where are the other daughters, for Sir Thomas Frankland, we gather, had twenty-one (although I believe that when this picture was painted, the close-of-play score was 19)? Well, for one thing, perhaps Hoppner was not a crowd painter. But even if the girls in general were as notable for good looks as the gallant admiral and his lady seem to have been for public-spiritedness (in which case the morning roll-call must have been a quarter of an hour quite pleasantly spent), we may safely assume that some were prettier than others. The artist, therefore, knowing that his duty is

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to depict something which is not merely beautiful, but typically representative of beauty, would make his somewhat misleading choice accordingly, not failing, also, to carry out any desirable gilding of the lily. (I may remark that I have not witnessed this interesting operation, although I once saw a flower-seller at Victoria Station surreptitiously pouring scent on his violets).

In the same way the films have been claimed to be a fantastic distortion of truth by exaggeration and omission, and as will be further considered in a later chapter, exception has long been taken to the sentimental idealism on which is presumably based their tendency

de nier ce qui est, et d'affirmer ce qui n'est pas.

But the basis of the entertainment film is the romantic tale, and the age-old ingredients of the tale are love, humour and excitement.

2. *Themes or Stories?*

When films first shewed signs of emerging from dull chronicle to coherent but fictitious narrative, it was supposed that the picturization of a story involved nothing more than photographing in pantomime a series of imaginary events—a stage-play divested of dialogue. Subsequently it was discovered by David Wark Griffith, the American producer of an early film named “The Adventures of Dollie,” that this was quite a mistaken view, and that the camera could and should be used to develop an entirely separate technique, in no way a cheap imitation comparing unfavourably with the stage.

The train of ideas which we can obtain when the camera's separate and apparently casual jig-saw shots are correctly assembled should, as an ideal, convey either a theme or a story through pictured movement and the contrast of masses and distances. Nothing static is suitable for the cinema, and certainly nothing depending from words (for even the stage play can be too verbose—take, for in-

stance, the tedious first act of "R.U.R.", and much of Lonsdale and Maugham). The film enables us to see that which the stage merely describes. These principles were discovered in about 1907, and it is a matter of regret and astonishment that they are not more frequently observed to-day.

Trifling stories and themes of the deepest reality can with equal facility be conveyed by the material, in itself illusory, at the camera's disposal, but it is not surprising that themes have generally been less acceptable than stories, and occasional masterpieces of the calibre of *Intolerance*, *Foolish Wives*, *Isn't Life Wonderful?* and *Caligari* have received comparatively indifferent support.

Mr. R. P. Messel goes to the extent of saying¹ that the film is not suitable for telling a story at all, but we shall probably accept this view less readily than Rudolf Arnheim's commonsense observation² that film treatment matters more than the actual story. How disappointing have been certain second versions of a famous film, e.g., *Quo Vadis?*, *Miracle Man*, *Comin' through the Rye* and *Tol'able David*. These contentions can be more thoroughly examined in a later chapter; but in the meantime we are concerned with reminiscences of the earliest films in which a story has been assumed to be necessary.

From the very beginning, the cinema has been an excellent vehicle for humour, especially of the fast-action type, and probably the first comedy was Max Linder's "Adventures of a Schoolboy." Apart from humour, the most suitable and successful story filmings—extraordinary though the statement may appear—have been cowboy and other Western pictures, which are the essence of cinema medium. The most hopelessly inappropriate, by the same count—the most utterly hostile to the cinema's reputation—have been the ill-timed attempts at photographing "sophisticated drawing-room drama." Mr.

¹ T.F.B., page 71.

² *Film als Kunst*.

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Andrew Buchanan mentions an almost incredible example of this folly, namely, the filming of Bernard Shaw's "How he Lied to her Husband." Just three characters in conversation in a room!

Suppose it is desired to film a murder or detective story. Well and good: some stories of this kind are full of fast action and excitement, and though the detectives of fiction vary greatly in their methods, commonsense should enable us to make a suitable choice. Gaboriau's "Lecoq" goes out and does things. Sherlock Holmes combines his well-known deductive powers and a commendable activity when the time is ripe. Poe's "Dupin" employs marvellous dialectical skill without moving from an armchair, and it should be unnecessary to say that these latter tales are—to put it mildly—ill-adapted for the camera. It is difficult to imagine a Special, Thrill-packed Christmas Double Number of "The Pig-Keeper's Friend" or the "Board of Trade Gazette," but this would be hardly more inappropriate than the recent filming of the "Murders in the Rue Morgue." (I am still confining my remarks to the film with conventional story treatment, and reserving the theme film until later).

It is too much to expect a new plot, and it was no objection (in view of the freshness of treatment) that the two amusing characters in "My Wife's Family" were the Mother-in-law and the Hungry Man, staple items in the ancient Greek and Sanskrit drama.* Novels are said to have a choice of twenty-three plots, but films seem to have reduced this number to three; hence many complete stories have been used again and again for filming, and some looked pretty well used-up the first time. If well-known stories and plays are selected for this purpose (and the present trend is to take little else), it seems a pity that the original characteristics should be so completely lost; for

* Aristophanes; Kalidasa.

we have no right to change an author's ideals, even though we may vary his words.

One cannot help sympathising with the author who, when asked how he came to think of the plot of his second novel, replied: "From seeing the film version of my first!" Who would recognise, in "Whoopee," Owen Davis' play "The Nervous Wreck"? Who would connect "Gold-Diggers of 1933" (or of any other year) with "The Best People"?

I have pondered long and hard to trace any possible connection between "The House of Doom" (Univl., 1934. Edgar G. Ulmer) and Poe's tale "The Black Cat."

It seems that in a literature examination during the spring of 1935, the University of Toronto had included some questions bearing on Dickens. The contemporary showing of Metro-Goldwyn's famous picture "David Copperfield" was doubtless accountable for the relentless marking of several students' papers:

"Failure—movie version."

Apparently there are not enough stories to go round, although we learn that out of 20,000 which were considered by the M.-G.M. studios in 1935, only 62 were purchased for filming. However, some producers do their best, and a particularly commendable effort stands to the credit of one of them who, finding a considerable surplus of film negative in hand after completing the famous, the masterly interpretation of "The Affairs of Anatol," made from it an entirely new—well, an entirely separate—story called "Don't Tell Everything." We have seen a good many films where this device has apparently been practised, but unfortunately there has been an absent-minded neglect to change the original name.

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Passing from the classic outrage upon Schnitzler, and the distortion of other famous novels for which Hollywood and Elstree owe so abject an apology to Dickens, Barrie,

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Kipling and Marie Corelli—even to Jack London and Zane Grey—let us see what some of the pre-shortage stories were like. The earliest films that I can remember (those of about 1908 and onwards) were either slight love tales or epics of cowboys in their exciting adventures with Indians (those culpable quasi-Indians who once accepted a dollar in payment for Manhattan, and have never rectified that overcharge). European studios presented comic and trick films of about half a reel, and sometimes, especially in France, coloured fairy romances, but there was little of the narrative element in them. Pathé and Eclair coloured pictures often shewed an ogre's castle, or something of the sort, and the hero, armed with a fairy wand or sword, would change the hostile troops into carrots and onions. The themes would perhaps not be considered over-intelligent to-day.

In America, the Vitagraph Company produced domestic comedies, or pictures of the Civil War, and it was a very uninformed picturegoer who couldn't distinguish between Unionist and Federal uniforms. Wild animals were a feature of Colonel Selig's contributions; the American Biograph gave love stories in every kind of setting; Edison filmed Dickens and Charles Reade with astonishing faithfulness to atmosphere; Kalem exhaustively covered the subject of Cowboy vs. Indian, and also made railway stories. Lubin did not specialise in any particular kind of entertainment, so far as I remember, but included some rather amusing farces with effective sub-titles. The serious films generally contained an imperilled heroine, and excited much speculation as to whether her descent were attributable to the unaided action of gravity, or accelerated by propulsive influences.

Specimens of Very Early Stories.

A Feud in the Kentucky Hills (American Biograph, 1910).
The settler's daughter (Mary Pickford) is coerced into an

engagement with an ostensibly pious neighbour. The "psalm-singer's" brother, sweetheart of her childhood, returns unexpectedly after some years' absence, and trouble naturally follows.

Vitagraph, with Maurice Costello. The son is a great trouble to his aged and somewhat unimaginative parents, as he is always dabbling in photography in the cellar, instead of learning to be a farmer. Disagreements become acute, and the young man runs away from home. On their wedding anniversary the parents, now hoary with eld, take a day trip to the market town, and decide to be photographed. The photographer, seeing them approach, hastily disguises himself, but later reveals his identity.

Probably American Biograph. A woman is seen seated at the brink of a pool near the cemetery, brooding over the death of her child. The surface of the pool clouds over, and she sees a comprehensive vision of how, if he had lived, her son would have grown to dissolute manhood, ending on the gallows.

American Biograph, with Blanche Sweet. (The heroine was then unnamed, although identified in England by the imaginary name "Daphne Wayne"). The girl's betrothed has gone on a long journey, and a rival affection results in his ceasing to write to her. Anxiety and sadness displace the carefree gaiety in her pretty face as, each succeeding day, she tears a leaf from the calendar in her bedroom.

Typical Civil War Picture. A young Federal officer loves a girl of the Southerners, and they contrive to meet in secret. He is captured by Unionists, and comes up for trial by the girl's father.

Typical Redskin Picture (e.g. Kalem). A half-breed is punished by a white settler, for caddish behaviour, and treacherously incites the normally friendly Indians to warfare. Mounted braves, apparently in possession of stolen rifles, gallop round the log-house in ever-narrowing circles,

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while others do their work with burning brands and incendiary arrows. Eventually the whites' stronghold takes fire. Meanwhile the hero, escaping disguised in a dead brave's feathers, speeds to the nearest outpost of U.S. Cavalry. The rescue party thunder up just as the besieged settlers are forced to leave the blazing building. The old campaigner, surveying the battlefield, sententiously announces that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian."

Variation of the above. A young American loves the Red-skin Chief's impossibly pretty daughter. The discovery infuriates Crouching Ox, who orders his daughter's imprisonment, and the deaths of the Paleface and his friends. Much bloodshed is averted when an old squaw reveals that the girl is of white descent, substituted when an infant. *Western stories* shewed the prospector who strikes pay dirt, and his desperate race with an unscrupulous rival, to stake his claim at the mining office; the feud between the Slanting S Outfit and the boys of Flaming L; the dishonest Sheriff and Ranch Foreman in league with cattle-rustlers; the hero who is accused of holding up the mail coach, figures in a "necktie party" and is rescued by the Sheriff's posse with 1/5 second to spare. The old-time dance hall and its good-hearted Queen were essential items in Klondyke pictures, and in all agricultural settings we are prepared to encounter the poor farmer and his wife, threatened with foreclosure unless their daughter marries the cruel landlord.

3. *Conventions of the Film Story.*

So we see that "the pictures," a scientific novelty in 1896, were entertainment in 1903 and a popular diversion by 1908 (although not, I fear, patronised by very intellectual people).

Films are exceedingly expensive to make, and producing firms do not lay out millions of dollars as a charitable pastime. They quite reasonably look for a return to cover their costs, and it is possible that their financial backers

are not in every instance too artistic to accept a substantial yield on their commitments. It is necessary, therefore, that films should provide not merely a profitable but a firmly-established investment: a secure future (compared, for instance, with that of the Mutoscope or Kinetoscope) can only be obtained by consulting the popular taste, and the mass level is not necessarily representative of high artistry and culture.

It was early suspected, and definitely established in about 1910, that while cowboy films were all very well, the public support could not be retained without a sex-appeal interest. Accordingly this interest was thenceforth provided under the superintendence of such experts as Miss Jeanie Macpherson and Mr. Cecil B. de Mille. You see, the film *must* pay, and so the conventionally necessary sex theme must receive attention. Just as in the purchase of a wireless set the one essential fitment to demand—compared with which nothing else matters—is a device to turn the thing off and keep it turned off, the *sine qua non* in films is profit, and this somewhat dictates the story and treatment. Strict accuracy can easily be made subservient to this consideration, and thus, especially in American films of historical period setting, the lore and the profits may be at variance.

There is always a theoretical danger, of course, that intellectual ideas may obtrude or insinuate themselves into even the most remunerative film, but modern studio efficiency methods have ensured that this contingency shall, as Bradstreet puts it, “constitute no more than an ordinary Trade risk.”

Next to the sex element, a certain amount of rather lavish display has been found desirable, and in this direction Miss Macpherson and the silken Cecil and others have undoubtedly done wonders, to the extent of extracting film entertainment out of even Barrie and Shakespeare, after these authors' works have been brought up to date

and re-titled. "Male and Female" was the name chosen for Miss Jeanie's successful effort at Barrie ("The Admirable Crichton" would have presented difficulties of pronunciation, in addition to sounding highbrow), with sex allure personified in a well-liked actress "gorgeously gowned"—although some critics are unkind enough to interpret this phrase as American for "grossly overdressed." We look forward with great interest to the proposed renovation of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," to be re-titled "Sex and Snags." I imagine it will be a spectacular song-and-dance film, shewing Montecchi and Capolletti as rival gangsters.

In Mr. Mille's competent hands, even Bible stories can be profitably used, after expert overhauling, and indeed some of the historic names lend the production a certain *cachet* which rather appeals to Americans as quaintly dignified. *The Ten Commandments* introduced a pretty embroidery of "cuties swinging from silken ladders" (I quote the contemporary description), and the incredible senility of Moses was offset by the winning charm of his sister, a pretty and by no means stand-offish girl of about seventeen. *Ben Hur* also had a strong love interest and a particularly beauteous chorus, but I saw no trace of the leper's cell.

A sex-appeal heroine being indispensable, we can imagine the righteous wrath of Mr. Samuel Goldfish, at the trick played on him by a Continental writer whom he had taken under his wing, giving him every chance to ripen in that artistic *milieu*, and make good as a film dramatist. It seems that this Maurice Maeterlinck had shown some little promise, and indeed Sam had heard, before hiring him, that there was money in his "l'Oiseau Bleu." Whether or not a misunderstanding was facilitated by Maeterlinck's Belgian nationality, combined with Mr. Goldfish's imperfect mastery of the English language—at any rate I well remember, and the story is told in Hollywood to this day,

how the favoured protégé's eagerly-awaited masterpiece was found to have a bee as heroine! . . . Sex-appeal in a bee!! . . .

Movie Mysteries.

Why, when the hero is marooned on a desert island, does his right trouser-leg always wear out first?

Why do fearfully old parents, who speak perfect English, have such young children, who don't?

Why is the revolver always kept in a drawer?

Why is there no cross 'twixt grinding poverty and drawing-rooms bigger than the Grand Central Junction?

Shall we ever see a screen newspaper without one of those exciting paragraphs?

How is there a horse ready saddled and bridled at all hours?

What do cowboys do for a living?

EARLIEST IMPRESSIONS



MAE MARSH.



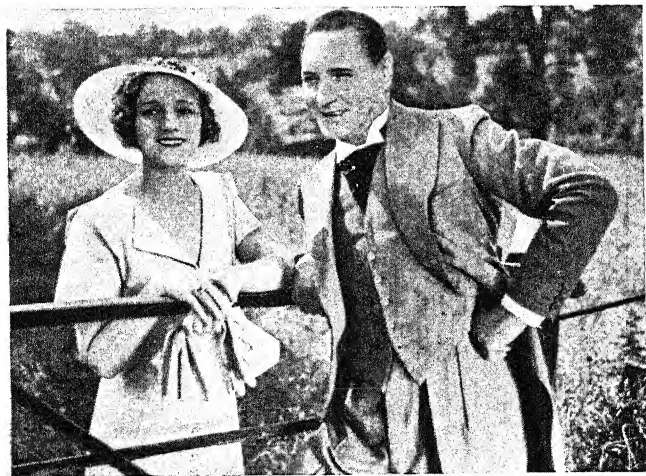
MAURICE COSTELLO.

VETERAN PLAYERS

HENRY B. WALTHALL.



ALICE JOYCE.



CHRISSIE WHITE AND HENRY EDWARDS.

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FILMING.

1. *Must Hollywood be the Movie Metropolis?*

I am often asked why America stands virtually without opposition as the home of films, and the question is natural enough. I should not have thought it was a very difficult problem, but although all sorts of tentative explanations have been published, I have never seen one that is satisfactory, or even plausible.

Is it because the light is so good in California, and California happens to be in the United States? Are films an American invention, or an institution peculiar to the States? If so, is California the most suitable district for making them? It is an important issue, on which a few observations may be of interest. The reader will acquit me of any national or local bias: I am merely relating the facts, and nothing in this book is intended to shew antagonism to the genuine film endeavours of any country.

To take, then, the two queries: Why America? and Why necessarily Hollywood? (a district which it is only bare justice to mention is in no way representative of American manners, intelligence and culture).

Movie manufacture has become America's especial perquisite through a combination of favourable natural circumstances and wholehearted industry and foresight. To put it very, very simply—the United States has, say, 120 million inhabitants (I am not bothering about exact statistics), and they are exceedingly keen on the kind of light and informal entertainment so conveniently supplied by the film. England, the only possible rival, has (we will say) 50 million inhabitants, and although keen, they are not so thoroughly enthusiastic.

“Over there” we go to the pictures three or four times a week regularly—the whole family. Every evening,

“when there’s no one home but the cat”¹; every evening, including Sundays in the calculation, the picture theatres of the United States give entertainment to eighteen million people! Some towns have performances continuing throughout the night. It immediately and inevitably follows that films are a bigger industry in America than anywhere else, and that the enormous domestic patronage makes it almost a matter of indifference as to what rental is received for exhibiting the surplus copies sent to other countries.

But unfortunately this is not all. Film-making requires enormous capital, cheerful and optimistic outlay, careful study and hard work, and where else shall we find all these in combination? The kinematograph is actually an English invention, but what of it? Aniline dyes were discovered by Sir William Perkin, but who ever heard of a British aniline monopoly? The internal-combustion car was invented by a Frenchman in 1862, but 1,550 plucky little American firms, of whom only 71 survive, have built up an industry which supplies 80 per cent. of the world’s cars.² The same country which allowed the Dunning process to pass into American hands, and did everything possible to discourage mechanical transport, tries to make a film with half a sham omnibus for scenery.³

As to California, the district is convenient enough, for filming purposes, but not indispensably suitable compared with many other places, and it is at an awkward distance from New York. The first we hear of the locality in such a connection is that Muybridge’s famous experiments were conducted at Senator Leland Stanford’s stock-breeding farm. The intensity of the light, a matter of no consequence nowadays, must have assisted things, but it seems to have been only one factor. Next we find that the vicinity of a town known as *El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de*

¹ Paramount Pictures Advt.

² “The World’s Automobiles.”

³ An actual instance in 1933.

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los Angeles was chosen by two producing firms, Essanay and Colonel Selig's, because they had very good reasons for wishing to be within handy reach of the Mexican border (in other words, in a position to leave the United States at very short notice). The exact circumstances need not be resurrected here.

This was in 1908, and in the following year the picture *The Sultan's Power* was made there, with Hobart Bosworth, a grand old veteran who is still playing to-day. The town has a suburb named Hollywood, eight miles distant, where Famous Players-Lasky acquired a broken-down looking shack for their studio. There, in 1913, Cecil B. de Mille directed Dustin Farnum in *The Squaw Man*. Then followed the development of that remarkable colony which has been unkindly called "the worst collection of parvenus on earth," with whose name the whole Republic rings; but film-making is by no means limited to the district comprising Hollywood, Culver City, Burbank and Universal City. However, by 1913, there were 60 West Coast studios as against 47 in the East, and at the present time the \$2,500,000,000 invested in America's fourth greatest industry includes \$150,000,000 appropriated to Hollywood studios.

2. *Studios of the Past.*

I have already related how Edison's "Black Maria" laboratory at Orange was thrown out of business by Robert Paul's film studio in Middlesex. Méliès operated in Paris, and then in April, 1896, a minstrel showman named William Selig started a similar venture in Chicago. The famous Vitagraph concern was founded in 1897 by two Englishmen, Albert E. Smith and J. Stuart Blackton, with a studio on top of the tall Morse building, New York.

Sigmund Lubin, a fair-ground cheapjack, started in Philadelphia soon afterwards, and two very important concerns, existing to this day, were initiated by Jewish second-hand clothes dealers who were apparently able to keep an

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exalted artistic sense and spiritual outlook unsullied in the surroundings of New York's Ghetto.

Colonel Selig (who, as we have seen, was obliged to move to El Pueblo, etc., etc.) formed a celebrated collection of wild animals for film purposes, and it was a great advantage to other studios to be able to hire them. Max Aaronson, like many others of his race, was a poor rider, and yet he actually passed as a typical American cowboy, under the name of G. M. Anderson ("Broncho Billy"—you must remember him, if you saw films before the War). He had appeared as one of the bandits in the *Great Train Robbery*. Mr. "Anderson," with his partner, Spoor, formed the S. and A. concern, whose great star, of course, was Charles Chaplin, although Broncho Billy himself appeared in the "Essanay" Western pictures. Kleine, Long and Marion embodied their initials in the film name "Kalem", which always brings back to my mind wild cowboys, pretty Red Indian maidens with long dark plaits, and saving the "Limited" (no other trains exist in films) by groping for a switch in the nick of time.

A fresh Edison studio soon appeared (although I think Edison himself took little interest in it), and also the famous American Biograph, of 14th Street, New York. They must be distinguished from the English "Urbanora" Biograph, with their troublesome film width of about four inches.

Hoping to circumvent the very unscrupulous practice of printing pirated copies of other companies' films, the principal manufacturers adopted a trade-mark for their pictures, and in several instances this design would be seen throughout the film—photographed into every scene, and not merely printed on the sub-titles. This somewhat detracted from realism, and also I believe it did not achieve the desired purpose, but it did characteristically distinguish one make of picture from another, in a way that does

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not obtain to-day. A description of some of these trademarks will probably bring back many recollections.

The Nordisk Company (Copenhagen) had a polar bear, and that's the only sign I can remember in Scandinavian productions, which of course included Swedish Biograph. *France*—Pathé has always had a golden rooster or "chan-tecler," and Eclair a flash of lightning (not a cream bun, as might be imagined). Gaumont shewed a heraldic variety of rose.

Italy—Cines, Ambrosio and Itala merely had the end signature of their names.

England—Hepworth had a curious signature looking like "Hepwix," or "heroic" written in Greek. Barker had a bulldog. London Film shewed the figure of Britannia, and Clarendon had their signature in an oval.

Now for the really famous ones. American Biograph had a big AB joined together, and Lubin a very solid church bell, and each of these signs was continuously photographed throughout the picture. A royal eagle with outstretched wings denoted the classic Vitagraph productions, a Redskin's head meant Essanay, and a gay parrot was Metro. Goldfish-Selwyn films were called "Goldwyn" (and so is Samuel himself, by special request), and they were marked with a couchant lion, apparently roaring ferociously, although, as now appears, it was only giving a strangled grunt. It is a real lion, presumably representing the Gay or Selig farm, and still appears—badly in need of a cough-drop—on the productions of the Metro-Goldfish-Selwyn-Louis B. Mayer amalgamation, the latter administered in tabloid form as M.G.M.

Who, amongst pre-war picturegoers, will not remember the pencil writing "Kalem" upon a background of a revolving circle? "Selig" or S appeared in a diamond; "AK" joined together meant American Kinema; the subtitles of Edison films bore a manuscript E in each corner. Finally (for we cannot go on for ever) the IMP (Indepen-

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dent Motion Picture) productions were afterwards called Universal or European, and they ended with a moving design of a terrestrial globe, about which the critics complain that it used to revolve backwards.

Nowadays many outdoor scenes are taken in the studio, but at that time it was the other way around, and the camera was directed at a flimsy strip of painted canvas or plyboard, fixed up in the backyard with tent-pegs. In the completed film it was a pretty sight to see the marble staircase flapping idly in the breeze.

At the same time the public became quite accustomed to seeing movie-makers at work in the streets, and on more than one occasion professional removers, taking advantage of this, completely ransacked a temporarily unoccupied house, while a sham camera ground away merrily, and a few property policemen kept the crowd back.

3. *At the Shrine of Culture.*

Like California in general, Hollywood presents several striking contrasts, some of which we will consider, as this bright little town cannot be ignored in any collection of movie reminiscences. Amongst the questions I am most frequently asked are:—(easily first) “Should I have a chance of getting on the films?”; “Are the girls as beautiful in real life?”; “Is it really such a marvellous climate?”; “Do they actually lead such wild lives, or is it only newspaper talk?”

The State of California is very much bigger than many Europeans seem to imagine—three times the size of England, for instance—and contains not one climate, but a dozen. The brilliant weather, indeed, is somewhat overrated,* and although I personally do not play in pictures, I can assure readers that my friends have more than once had unpleasantly narrow escapes in those parts of sunny film-land represented by, let us say, the Mojave Desert

* Greenland Ranch, in July, 1913, had the world's record temperature of 134° in the shade.

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and Death Valley. Thus disillusionment early comes upon us, rather qualifying the bright picture which adorns the tin of peaches.

The actual capital of California since 1848 is, of course, Sacramento, an unimportant town compared with its predecessor, San Francisco, just as 'Frisco now comes a poor second to Los Angeles (frequently abbreviated to "Los" or "L.A.", and equally often pronounced "Anjeeleeze": for full name, see part of page 16). Apart from movie-making, there is little definite crime in the Los district, and conduct is a good deal more decorous than that obtaining in San Francisco, a gay place which is not troubled with the other town's handicaps of slight Puritanism and midnight closing. Perhaps this sounds surprising, but a strict regard for truth obliges one to say that the behaviour of Hollywood's inhabitants is relatively conventional, having regard to the circumstances, and despite many misleading reports, the Taylor murder, for instance, and the A—— scandal—to take only two *causes célèbres*—were not staged in the immediate neighbourhood of Hollywood, although the events occurred among picture players in California. It must be mentioned that an enormous proportion of the population are movie folk, in a broad sense, and thus it was a shrewd guess when Mrs. Patrick Campbell asked Harold Lloyd: "And are you employed on the films?"

Coming to those players themselves, and to the rest of the personnel of film production, we find that they also have their quaint contrasts, in addition to the human foibles which we recognise as inseparable from so high a degree of culture and idealism. They are endowed with that curious faculty of blending the apparently irreconcilable—abstract art and material shrewdness; altruistic lavishness and calculating opportunism—but we know that all is inspired by the most aesthetic motives.

If, in many cases, they have not bothered to encumber

themselves with the prosaic formalities of routine education, they doubtless attach greater importance to the hyperculture conferred by generations of fine breeding, and any such trifling *lacunæ* can be filled, always supposing that film requirements so dictate, by the specialist institutions established for that purpose. If one or two are self-made men, at least they adore their maker. Producers perhaps exist who imagine Manual Labour to be a South American president, and who suppose "egotist" is a name for a poultry farmer; but we enjoy the romantic fragrance of that old-world courtesy which they invariably shew to even the humblest of the girls playing under them, and we must avoid the blunder of calling them illiterate, lest they instantly produce their birth certificate.

Reverting to the expensive "grooming" process* generously provided by some American organizations, we can easily realise that this is not particularly designed for the benefit of that elect Brahmin caste, the hereditary film-born of the colony; for the whole need not a physician. Rather is it to be regarded as a sort of Nobel Prize in *belles-lettres* awarded to the more promising amongst the votaries of the lesser arts—the stage; perhaps literature, painting and music—those emigrant disciples from Europe who are willing to sit humbly at the feet of Movie-dom, and then by gradual stages

In penal fires effacing

Their last faint earthly stains

qualify for that infinitely higher and more spiritual sphere. We cannot avoid wistful conjecture as to what might have been the goal reached by Irving, Duse, Kean, Mrs. Siddons, if Hollywood grooming had been available to them. Bernhardt, it is true, was accepted in the rough, but "Queen Elizabeth", though bought by the U.S.A., was a French-made film, and in any case those were easy-going days.

*In the case of one of Stanislavsky's stage players, this refit cost \$15,000.

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Liberal patrons of the arts in general, Hollywood's denizens give benign encouragement to music, painting and poetry. In heraldry, their favourite colours are thought to be Or and Argent; in music, they believe in letting everyone hear the best, and I remember an impresario, some ten years ago, who ordered that Wagner himself should be placed under contract to conduct his own works at a special picture theatre, as this would look very well on the bills. Their superior conception of Art frequently enables the New World showmen to improve upon the original score, and Dr. Carl Engel¹ describes how, in the performance of the "Anvil Chorus" at the Chicago World's Fair, a quite *hors concours* effectiveness was given to the orchestration by the use of a piece of artillery which was fired to enhance the fortissimo chord. In San Francisco we have the very arbitrary and snobbish line of demarcation represented by Market Street, involving a hearty contempt for anyone living "South of the Slot",² but in Hollywood the degree of cultural attainment evidently forms the only social criterion. I remember reading a notice posted up in the Paramount Studios (I think they were filming a du Maurier story):—

"Extras will please not talk to Miss F——", and admiring tribute was paid to this star of the moment by one of the atmosphere players in question, who thus delivered herself:—"I like her; she's regular, and don't demean herself by talking to anyone less than an assistant director."

They are discerning folk, and know that all is not green that golders. In Georges Spitzmuller's *Nouveaux Riches*, somewhat disparaging reference is made to a wealthy Parisian who was sparing no expense in the "bringing out" of his daughter. Friends were astonished to see an enormous Pleyel Grand arriving at the house, for they knew that he already had a magnificent piano. However, it appeared that this Mlle. Jourdain—or whatever her name

¹ "From Mozart to Mario."

² An expression referring to the electric tramway.

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might have been—was to have music lessons from the smartest and most expensive teacher in Paris, and the fond parent shrewdly judged that all classy families would certainly provide one piano each for teacher and pupil.

Well, why not, if you can afford it? It's stylish. And so, if a Milo Venus is ordered for a Hollywood garden, and it is shipped an arm short or anything like that, why, it's just fired back again. You can't fool their deep artistic sensibility; and yet, just because they like things nice, they are jealously accused of being parvenus.

Their contempt for pettiness of outlook was well brought out by Sam Silberstein, when he saw the wretched little figure of a man they were choosing for the title-rôle of a Napoleon film. "Say! Why couldn't they pick a big, important-looking guy?" For this incident I am indebted to the authors of "Star Dust in Hollywood", but I can supply a similar one from first-hand knowledge. A British Company, also, had made a film of Napoleon and Joséphine, and one of my colleagues in the States, in reviewing it, was forced to record that Napoleon was played by "a stubby little fellow named Gwylym Evans."

Now for one or two reminiscences of opportunism and the eye to the main chance. I think it must have been a Hollywood mind that devised the bright scheme for cross-breeding carrier pigeons with parrots, so that if lost they could ask the way home. At any rate, some of their trouble-saving schemes have been most ingenious.

I have already mentioned that films cost money, and perhaps I have conveyed a hint that, though it may be "a blackboard to Eggeling and a window to Richter and Rutt-mann",* the Screen is chiefly a shove-dollar board to Adolph and Jesse. Hence, although no essential expenditure is vetoed, money-saving devices are welcome. Here is an early instance:—

The Universal Company required to take a night scene

*Ivor Montagu—*Close Up*.

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involving a crowd of smartly-dressed people. A couple of hundred "extra" players would have had to be paid \$10 each, for doing practically nothing. To avoid this, a cordial invitation was sent to a business men's club at the aforesaid Town of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels, for a reception at which evening dress would be worn. On arrival, the guests were told that as a special feature of the evening's entertainment, they would be allowed to take part in a real film. It is said that, on the Company's instructions, the same device was practised at their English studio, but as I was not in England I cannot vouch for it.

"On hearing of a wreck along the coast within easy distance," we are informed in an enthusiastic tribute to American films,* the producer "will promptly journey with his band of players . . . weaving a marine drama en route . . . The fact that he is not thoroughly familiar with his subject matters little."

So I have gathered.

A friend who is going "on loka" to make South Sea Island pictures tells me that he proposes to take the opportunity of filming the intriguing and still unsolved mystery of the "Marie Céleste." I was not surprised to hear that he will give the story a freedom of treatment in which imagination will not be sacrificed for accuracy.

From a later page of the book mentioned above, we learn that a group of Kalem players were "making a batch of modern dramas in the Holy Land". I don't know why they were there, unless the country had special associations for some of their Board, but at any rate they were, and the leading lady had the inspiration "that it would be exceedingly opportune to film the life of our Saviour". She therefore scribbled off something snappy on the spot, and it was cutely put over. An ingenious touch was to get Mohammedans to take part in the crucifixion scenes.

**Making the Movies*.—E. A. Dench.

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Yes, there's quite a lot of money in Bible films, if they are smartly exploited, after obtaining the goodwill of influential church authorities.

4. *The Artistic Staff at Work.*

When we go to the Theatre, we expect to be entertained by either a display of realism (carefully controlled in the manner I have already explained) or the artistry of stage illusion. I think the latter is preferable on the whole, because a mere photograph of life is apt to lack inspiration and novelty, and Art should have the function of creating anew, and not merely imitating. This, of course, does not alter the fact that whenever realism obtains in a play, either wholly or in part, no pains should be spared in carrying it out thoroughly.

One of the faults I must record in my reminiscences of the cinema is that it has not sufficiently kept under control its remarkably superior capacity for faithfully representing life. The general realism is oft overdone, while at the same time insufficiently careful attention is given to truth of detail and accurate consistency of setting. Let us go and compare values elsewhere before making our choice.

The wonderful masterpiece "*Travels into several remote Nations of the World*", actually the work of Jonathan Swift, purported to have been written by "*Lemuel Gulliver: first a surgeon and then a captain of several ships*". In the whole of this remarkable book, as I need hardly remind readers, the untruthful account of marvellous adventures is presented with such realism and coherence that it is impossible to detect an inconsistency. If any doubt were entertained that at all events the author was genuine—a bona-fide sailor—it was dispelled by the following highly technical passage on navigation (Part II, Chapter I):

"Finding it was likely to overblow, we took in our spritsail, and stood by to hand the foresail; but, making

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foul weather, we looked the guns were all fast and handed the mizen. The ship lay very broad off, so we thought it better spooning before the sea, than trying or hulling. We reefed the foresail, and set him, and hauled aft the foresheet; the helm was hard a-weather. The ship wore bravely. We belayed the fore downhaul; but the sail was split, and we hauled down the yard, and got the sail into the ship, and unbound all the things clear of it. It was a very fierce storm; the sea broke strange and dangerous. We hauled off upon the laniard of the whipstaff, and helped the man at the helm. We would not get down our topmast, but let all stand, because she scudded before the sea very well and we knew that the topmast being aloft the ship was the wholesomer, and made better way through the sea, seeing we had sea-room. When the storm was over, we set foresail and mainsail, and brought the ship to. Then we set the mizen, maintopsail, and the foretop-sail. Our course was east-north-east, the wind was at south-west. We got the starboard tacks aboard, we cast off our weather-braces and lifts; we set in the lee-braces, and hauled forward by the weather bowlings, and hauled them tight, and belayed them tight, and hauled over the mizen-tack to windward, and kept her full and by as near as she would lie."

This astonishing miniature treatise, written merely as part of a clergyman's novel, was accepted as so authoritative that professional seamen were in the habit of using it for a sort of examination paper in seamanship. Two hundred years later a film company, despite the fact that they had only to be guided by their expertly-written text, "The Mutiny of the *Elsinore*", made a mere travesty of a picture which "violated every canon of the Sea."*

Again, let us recall one of those railway thrillers at the theatre. One scene shews perhaps a signal-box, and although we can hardly expect to see the trains, no doubt

* Mrs. Jack London.

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there is a distant view of junction lines, with some real signals working. The express is to be wrecked by desperadoes, or it has some sort of mysterious freight—at any rate, the express is supposed to pass within sound of the audience, and this is what happens in the signal cabin:—

Bell signal from Section A—acknowledged.

Four strokes on bell from Section A. Release facing-points lock; clear facing-points on branch line Up; lock points on main line Up. Four strokes and “Line Clear” to Section A, and accept train by permissive block apparatus. Offer train to Section C and similarly obtain acceptance. Pull off starting, home and distant signals. “Enter-Section” warning to Section C. “Train Out” to Section A. Release home (with distant) signal. Release starting signal.

[But, my dear! how hopelessly complicated! How ever can anyone possibly tell whether the man faces the points or points the faces?]

All this must be done without a tremor of hesitation, as the actor, who last week was playing the part of a bar-tender, is now completely merged in the personality of an expert who has had three years' intensive training in a railway signalling school before even being allowed to work in a cabin. The slightest inaccuracy is bound to be detected by someone in the audience, which as likely as not includes railwaymen, and the result will be immediate jeers and subsequent derisive letters to the Press.

Compare the film's infinitely greater resources of atmosphere, and its frequent abuse of them. On the screen we shall see an unquestionably real railway system, with locomotives, carriages, booking offices and close-up views of machinery.* The home life of the engine-driver, and much else that is hardly relevant to the subject, will be shewn in exhaustive and exhausting detail, and on an enormously costly scale: no expenditure, and—within limits—no

* I here use the expressions current in England.

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trouble has been spared. And yet, so far as the broad essential of the story is concerned, we shall reject the suggestion that the scene represents the Southern Railway of England, on perceiving that the locomotive has a cow-catcher or a bell (as was the case in one of the latest talking films), or else we shall be at least mildly surprised that a journey from Paris to Dijon should be made in a coach plainly marked "A.T. and S.F.R."*

The reader is doubtless well aware of the differences in conditions obtaining on the stage and in films, as to the desirability of realism and the means of promoting it. I remember C. M. Hallard's inviting me to a *matinée* of "The Prime Minister", in which, it may be recollected, he was the Premier, and another important character was the Minister for War, who appeared in the Service dress uniform of a general officer. At tea after the performance, Mr. Hallard mentioned that several soldiers from the audience had good-naturedly pointed out that the elderly general was wearing the ribbon of the Military Cross—a technical inconsistency, as this decoration is confined to ranks between warrant officer and captain, and was not instituted until the Great War. This was surely discovering a mare's nest, and in any case it is the custom to introduce a slight error into all present-day uniforms worn on the stage.

As contrasted with a single guiding individual, a producer (who at the same time expects all players to make a thorough study of their rôles), the film has an obligatory staff of highly-paid quasi-experts who are supposed to work with the director, and to save the actors from all responsibility. I have known a stage actress to take employment under the Post Office in order to prepare for her part of a telephone operator; Matheson Lang went to live in China before producing "Mr. Wu", and I understand that another player, desiring an accurate study of the effects of chronic alcoholism, spent some time in a prohibition country.

* Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad.

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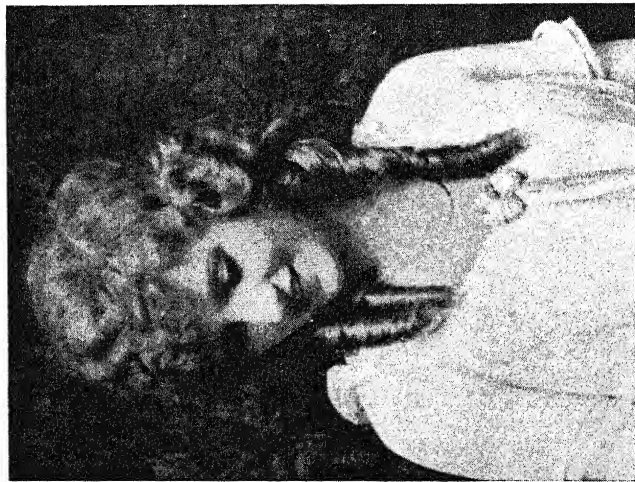
Yet all this careful preparation is made with very little fuss, compared with the flourish of trumpets which film publicity seems to require. Faced with its excess of cooks, the film is often more syndicate than sinning, and the art staff turn out to be a very questionable blessing—indeed, an extenuating circumstance.

Not that I would attempt to deny the experience and competence of the carpenters and the wardrobe and make-up people, or the learning of the advisors on historical costumes and period settings; but their talents are rarely allowed to shine to advantage, and only too often the expert's part in the film is confined to a "credit line" in the preliminary title. At the same time there is no doubt that some buried talent is not buried deep enough.

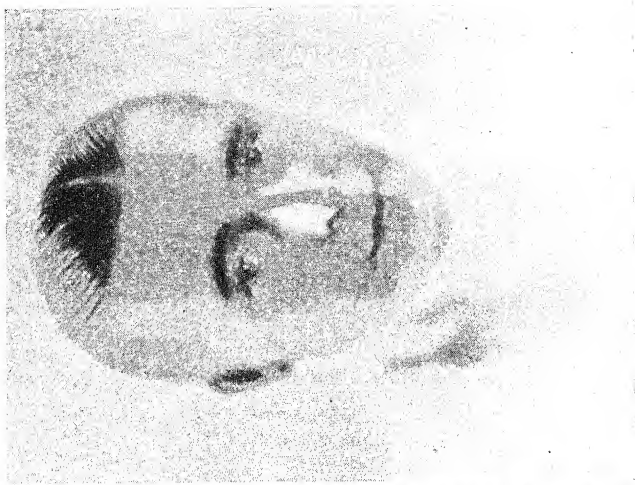
Remarkable faithfulness to atmosphere is obtained in many French and German films with a single artist in charge, but in Hollywood it is a standing wonder that high salaries should be paid to specialists whose advice is entirely disregarded, and whose protests, if any, go in at one ear and out at the other, like water off a duck's back. The "Four Feathers" personnel refused to wear the correct uniform of the Egypt campaign; the architecture in *The Queen of Sheba* and the shoes and hats in chivalry pictures were the most laughable hotch-potch; the Viennese atmosphere in *Anatol* was about equal to the Rome of *Ben Hur*. But all these must be content with a mere honourable mention when competing against the mediaeval England of *When Knighthood Was in Flower*.

Yes, there is no doubt that in the United States we have too many people on the job, and after the deed has been perpetrated, it is difficult to fix on the particular—but not sufficiently particular—individual who was to blame for not realising that the big photograph of Colonel Lindbergh was out of place in Lady Teazle's drawing-room, and that the saintly expressions of the white-robed nuns would have thriven better without the ceaseless nourishment of chewing-

TYPES OF PLAYERS: Ingénue, Hero



MARY MILES MINTER.



WALLACE REID.

TYPES OF PLAYERS: Villain, Cowboy



E. VON STROHEIM.



WILLIAM S. HART.

gum. Whereas too much realism is "taken on", too little is colourably represented. It has been pointed out that Art flourishes best under restrictions, and Hollywood is spoilt by having nearly everything ready at hand, and plenty of money for obtaining whatever else is required.

The United States Government and municipal authorities, also, give every assistance and encouragement, and would think nothing of lending a fleet or a couple of divisions of police for picture purposes.

The authorities in Europe, for that matter, have been more accommodating lately, especially the British Admiralty (if we are to believe the somewhat surprising announcements in certain would-be naval pictures). It was pleasing to note that in the filming of *The Iron Stair* permission was given to the inclusion of views of a real convict prison. The convicts themselves are said to have lent enthusiastic assistance, even offering to vacate their quarters for the greater convenience of the actors and technicians.

5. *Expending the Old Clo' Profits.*

Yes, it's an expensive game, as I have already said; a venture which it would be useless to embark upon, in the absence of generous financial backing. Consequently the "big men" in pictures have been those who could provide the commodity that talks most, even in silent films:—Jesse Lasky, Samuel Goldfish, Carl Laemmle, Adolph Zukor, Louis B. Mayer, Lewis J. Selznick, Marcus Loew, Joseph Schenck. To this list it might perhaps be proper to add the names of one or two gentiles, except that it is not easy to recall an example off-hand.

Film-making is costly enough in any country. The Italian masterpiece, *Theodora*,* called for an outlay of £750,000, eight times as much as the recent British production, *Private Lives of Don Juan*. Abel Gance's *Napoléon* must have been pretty expensive, too, but needless to say the highest figures are found in America. I believe the records

* Ambrosio, Turin. Sardou also wrote "Dora" (the stage play 'Diplomacy').

for expenditure are held by *Hell's Angels* (\$5,000,000) and the 1926 version of *Ben Hur* (\$4,500,000), representing a cost of £100 per second of shewing on the screen.

These formidable amounts may in some cases be due to copyright fees, or else high salaries or excessive figures for time and material.

The copyright charges have increased out of all reason, with the continued growth of films. At one time it was considered that Ritz-Carlton's payment of \$100,000 was a lavish fee for the stage play, *Cobra*, but this was only half of what was realised under the agreement for *The Four Horsemen*, and in the case of *Ben Hur* the preliminary royalty of half a million soon swelled to over a million dollars. Happily, Messrs. Klaw and Erlanger seem to have been influenced by sentiment, by reason of its being a Scripture story: but who knows that another firm might not have taken quite a mercenary attitude in assessing the charge?

As to the payment made to the players, especially in an all-star production, this is often a considerable item. While a mere infant might have to be satisfied with twice the President's salary, adults feel obliged to ask, in aid of their expenses, a contribution which might appear generously computed, did we not realise that in the name of Art they may perhaps have foregone the luxurious comfort of their famed ancestral homes, in exchange for the monastic asceticism of Hollywood.

Even with the most Spartan economy, they evidently find the place expensive, although many anomalies exist. Hotel tariffs, for instance, are cheaper than one would expect, but transport, jewellery, clothing . . . !¹ Eddie Schmidt charges \$350 for a lounge suit—at least he formerly did so. Miss Norma Talmadge's wardrobe was said to cost her £10,000 a year. One would think the tradespeople supposed they were catering for a town of millionaire vulgar-ians.

Elliott Dexter's remuneration of \$750 for a morning's work in the prelude to *The Falcon*, Nazimova's fee of \$2,000 a day; Miss Edna Purviance's constant retaining salary, despite her making no films—all these are instances of an expense factor which has to be considered, especially in a super-production with 25 stars, all receiving one half to three-quarters of the high figure advertised by their publicity agent.

The cost of a screen play obviously increases with every additional month in the period of its making. A cheap Western can be put together in a couple of days, for a mere \$100,000, and a comedy in a single afternoon, but serious and careful work takes longer. When it was announced that one of the old-time Ford cars could be assembled in 1 min. 32 secs. (or something of the sort: I am supplying figures at random), I remember reading a protest that 1½ minutes should be enough, to which it was replied that the extra 2 seconds were very desirable, in order to ensure a thorough overhaul of all working parts.

Chaplin and von Stroheim require two years to make a film. Abel Gance's *Napoléon* took 5 years, which was six months longer than the period that partly accounted for the expensiveness of *Theodora*. When we realise that the overhead cost of the studio is about £50,000 per week, even when no picture is being made, we begin to see where the money goes.

Then, of course, not to mention the actual film stock (the cameras used 42 miles of negative in making *Daughter of the Gods*), there is the lavish generosity with sets and properties. A short dream "insert" in Mr. de Mille's *Forbidden Fruit* (lasting only a few seconds) contained \$100,000 worth of plate glass. Let us imagine the charming English country idyll "'Lorna J. Doone', with All Star Cast and 1,000 Real Elephants", including the magnificent banqueting scene in quite the most expensive part of Devonshire ("Later that night at the Doone home").

We are not surprised to hear that a three-acre reception-hall of this kind will cost a quarter of a million dollars, to say nothing of Lorna's ornamental bathing pool.

We in America do not stint in seeing that films are well supplied with attractions. In many an African jungle picture, for instance, it has been found that a pleasing touch could be added by introducing varieties of elephants and tigers conventionally regarded as peculiar to India, and of course no pedantic quibble prevents our giving this luxury. It is related that Sam Silberstein, inspecting a set where a Scripture film was being made, freely voiced his disgust on finding that a supper scene was prepared for only thirteen people, whereas, he scornfully observed, by hiring a couple of hundred "extras"

6. *Art and the Camera—or at any rate the Camera.*

The advances in cine-photography necessarily call for corresponding improvements in the lighting of the set and the make-up of the players. Whereas the "still" camera takes, for illustration and publicity purposes, large photos which can afterwards be re-touched and otherwise improved, even the ordinary processes known as "intensification and reducing" are more or less denied to the film, and re-touching is out of the question. It will also be obvious that with a filming speed of 16 or 24 frames per second, there is no latitude in the time of exposure, and absolute correctness, beyond guesswork, must be ensured by other means. This progress towards perfection, although steady, is very slow, and even to-day we can see plenty of poor photography and bad lighting, and also, curiously enough, occasional picture composition that is unsuitably beautiful for the purpose in view.

Camera, lights and make-up have all undergone modification since talking pictures were forced upon the industry, and have of course shared in the general set-back of about ten years which the infant art has thereby suffered.

And so the scrapping of the Kliegl and arc lights and the consequent change in make-up tints have caught some camera-men unawares, and we still have bad, shadowless photography, reminding us of certain moments in old First National pictures, in which Miss Constance Talmadge appeared to have no nose. Sometimes it will be an American, sometimes a Continental picture that errs in this way

When it was not so important that all equipment should be dead silent, the arcs kept up a vigorous hissing, and the camera made a loud clicking noise. If a nature film was desired, a clockwork machine had to be installed in the field some days beforehand, to make an incessant noise which would accustom the animals to the real camera. The camera could be hand-turned, or worked by electricity or clockwork, but for talking films it is essential that it should keep in strict time with the sound-recording apparatus, and this involves an electrical drive, the two separate instruments being kept in exact step by a most ingenious application of alternating current.

Apart from the terribly shackling influence of dialogue, the camera should be independently creative in the cinema, and not, as has so often been assumed, a mere underling whose duty is to record without imagination whatever is put before it. What a debt the cinema owes to the remarkable photographic demonstrations in *Caligari*, *The Golem*, *The Street* and *Siegfried*! The camera-man and the director are everything in the film, as the true effects are created in the camera, and not outside. When we see the Israelites crossing the Red Sea,* we may call it marvellous photography if we wish, but the question of its being a real and literal record does not come into the matter, and I have already explained that all cinema shots are illusory.

The unfortunate stressing of realism as against symbolism has caused an intermittent demand for coloured and even stereoscopic films, as the public were under the impression

* "The Ten Commandments"—Paramount.

that these would give a welcome life-like effect. Colour *value*, of course, is desirable, and the use of "pank stock" has brought the lovely cloud photography which now delights us, even in a quite ordinary Western subject. Actual coloured pictures have on the whole been most successful when the colour was painted over the image, sometimes by hand, and such pictures have been seen since the earliest days. Amongst serious attempts at colour photography, however, I remember the 1911 *Delhi Durbar*; *The Last Days of Pompeii*, 1912; part of *Quo Vadis?*, 1913, and so on until the coming of the Prizma process.

This system of Kelley's was evolved from the Friese-Greene researches after years of experiment, and it was claimed that it would shew a movie girl blushing (if anything could). It was used in *The Glorious Adventure* (Blackton, 1922), but the colours were undoubtedly an improvement on nature. A very objectionable effect of colour photography was the overlapping or want of "registration" of the various colours, and in some cases a general rainbow effect, noticeable all over the image. *Whoopee* (United Artists, 1931) and the *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (Warner Bros., 1933) were made by the more recent Technicolour system, which had already been tried in *Wanderer of the Wasteland* (1924), and gives excellent results, so far as the mere colouring goes.

The Power of Love (Perfect Pictures, 1922) was a stereoscopic picture, this being another step in the craze for novelty and supposed realism. Patrons were provided with spectacles having one eye red and the other eye green, and by using these they perceived a startling effect of solidity and relief.

I can best explain the remarkable Dunning process by first referring to Adrian Samoiloff's scheme of stage lighting, which is based on the same principle of partial invisibility. It was very mystifying to audiences of some ten years ago, who were watching Paul Whiteman's Band grouped

on the stage in evening dress, to see them suddenly transformed into gaily-clad darkies dancing in a cotton-field. At another touch of a switch they were in sober black again. Through the courtesy of its genial Stage Manager, I carefully inspected the lighting equipment of the London Hippodrome, one of the theatres where this device was installed, and I gather that the secret is the accurately regulated use of monochrome lighting, in conjunction with corresponding or conflicting tints applied to the faces and clothing of the players. For instance, supposing their faces were coloured light blue: then under a yellow beam they would appear fair, but a reddish beam would make them swarthy. Moreover, a pure blue beam would be incapable of revealing any of their clothing coloured blue, which would consequently disappear from sight.

In the Dunning invention the actual background is eliminated by a blue filter, and a separately photographed background is similarly substituted. In the Schufftan process, on the other hand, two scenes are photographed together to appear as one.

The studio "still" camera produces views which, although they cannot always be said to be strictly copied from the film, endeavour to represent the spirit and atmosphere of a particular sequence or moment. We cannot strictly compare a static with an apparently moving image. The studio photographers will also, either officially or privately, supply portraits of the stars or featured players. As far as possible a separate exclusive pose is furnished to each periodical. The curse of Hollywood grooming is of course the slavish tendency to make everyone look the same as everyone else.

The professional (non-studio) portrait photographers of the colony are exceedingly efficient and sometimes artistic, and they have a very extensive business, as a player will frequently require 5,000 copies of a successful pose. For small quantities a typical charge will be \$20 for 25 large

photos, although some studios will cut the price to \$10 or less. The most famous artists appear to require one Christian name and two surnames, e.g., Edwin Bower Hesser, Alfred Cheney Johnston, Edward Thayer Monroe, Clarence Sinclair Bull.

From one consideration and another, I find it difficult to believe a young colleague's report that on calling for an interview at "Pickfair", Beverly Hills, he found the household in a state of unusual excitement, because this was the day when Mary was to have her photo taken.

7. *The Mecca of the Screen-lorn.*

*Oh come to the land of the Western sun,
Where every business is overdone.
The Movie Stars marry twice a year
And would marry again if the road was clear.
Bring all your cash and plenty of clothes:
Where you'll get any more, the Lord only knows.*

—from a suggested contribution to the Los Angeles Publicity Campaign, by Tom Marshall.

In reply to your enquiry: No, I most emphatically cannot recommend you to attempt to "get on the films", and I hope you will abandon the idea at once. I am tired, we are all tired, of warning girls not to do this, but I generally find that one's advice is not sought until the enquirer has already made a final decision.

But while movie ambition is bad enough, infinitely worse is the desire to go to Los in pursuit of it. Why not starve on films in a small way, in your native town, before going to starve on a professional scale in Hollywood? Nevertheless, thousands of young people, especially girls, make the annual pilgrimage to this modern El-Mikkeh, longing to refresh their eyes with a sight of the sacred Ka'aba in the foyer of Grauman's.* (N.B.—Why not make it the Miracle Grotto at Lourdes this year?) One girl *walked* from

* A sort of shrine to greatness, at the Chinese (formerly Egyptian) Theatre, Hollywood Boulevard.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

Seattle to Hollywood: thousands of others have somehow contrived to save the very expensive fare from New York—or perhaps part of it, trusting to luck for the rest.

And what kind of luck is necessary? At least 20,000 names of experienced players are waiting on the books of the Central Casting Bureau, and therefore it would be cheerfully optimistic to say that a novice's chance is as favourable as 1 in 20,000. I wonder if the public realise how many, even of those who are regularly employed, can count on as much as two days' work per week. If a girl has no other assets than youth and beauty, with which California is hopelessly overstocked, her chances of becoming a famous star are about 300,000 to 1 against. If, on the other hand, she is definitely talented, then Hollywood is no place for her, and I wish I could get people to see this.

What earthly merit can there be in attaining success in, and of, and in any way connected with, that degrading atmosphere of contemptible mediocrity? I very much admire a subtle reply which my Editor once gave,* pretending to misunderstand her, to one of our thousands of American girl correspondents:—

“So you want to become a great actress? There's more money in the movies.”

These remarks may seem severe, especially as I am not prejudiced against the cinema, but it should be remembered that they are the earnest and unbiased view of the more well-informed American press, apart from what may be thought in other countries. My magazine, which was originally conducted from Hollywood itself, never gives direct encouragement to anyone to yearn for a film career, but I wish we could go further, and entirely eliminate the silly glamour paragraphs and intimate illustrations which unfortunately the public adore. May I moreover be allowed to suggest to European papers, if it be not thought impertinent, that in their well-meant efforts in the same direction

* March issue, 1923.

they might be wise to confine themselves to the exact facts?

Mr. Charles Laughton and Sir Cedric Hardwicke have made public-spirited and most laudable gestures in encouraging talented English players to remain in the country which needs their services, but an illustrated daily paper, possibly with a similar intention, suggests that British girls have never made a great success in American films.

This is at variance with the facts, perhaps unfortunately, and as a great many aspirants will be in a position to disprove the statement, I doubt whether any good purpose could have been served by publishing it, and by suppressing the corrected version which I hastened to supply. The truth, even though apparently hostile to one's purpose, will generally be found most serviceable in the end, and the truth is that a number of girls of British birth have attained great success, and sometimes world fame, in American films.

The latter category surely includes Mary Pickford, Norma Shearer, Marie Pré vost, Marie Dressler and Enid Bennett. The first film star in America, or in the world, was English, and others very popular in the States, where indeed they have become more famous than in their own country, include Violet Heming, Eileen Percy, Sylvia Breamer, Flora Le Breton, Joan Standing, Peggy Hyland, Louise Lovely, Dorothy Mackaill, Maureen O'Sullivan and Lilian Harvey.

I readily admit this, but it does not affect the fact that European girls, though of unrivalled appeal in their own pictures, have very little chance of breaking into Hollywood. Surely this is not so very surprising, in view of the negligible prospects of the Americans themselves? The London newspaper in question, actuated by the good intentions with which Hell is paved, proceeds to air the views of alleged experts who have decided that English girls must lack some quality or qualities desirable for film work. This most damaging suggestion, calculated to inspire girls with the idea that they have only to overcome

the supposed deficiency, is almost entirely unfounded.

If it can possibly be called a prospect or goal of ambition to get into Hollywood movies, British girls have a better chance than those of other European countries—in any case infinitesimal—and if there is any specific obstacle to their progress, it is not a defect, but the asset of breeding and education, which sometimes causes a lady to dislike being addressed by her Christian name and coarsely sworn at, by studio “artists” redolent of the scum of the Bowery, who ought to be pushing an onion-barrow.

The aspirants still come in their thousands, however, stoutly refusing to be undeceived; armed with plenty of hope, school certificate, photographs, letter of introduction and the medal Father won at Big Bend, Ark., Pig Show. In some instances, also, they will provide themselves with new visiting cards, having heard that girls originally called Selma Pittack, Lehua Waipahua, Ola Cronk and Augusta Apfel deemed it advisable to change to Wanda Hawley, Margaret Loomis, Claire Windsor and Lila Lee. Thus they early make a name for themselves. (Brave girl: Martha Sleeper!).

Influence and introductions I now believe to be worse than useless, although I suppose I did not always hold that view, as I remember once asking a world-famous impresario, the late Lionel Powell, to do something for one of my friends. It was at a Clara Butt recital, and, perhaps because I was the guest of Kennerley Rumford, the great man was very affable, and made exciting promises. In the matter of films, at any rate, it may be taken for granted that everyone has an introduction, and it is equally safe to assume that this can confer no magic boon. In fact there is always a risk that it might lead to a preliminary trial in a picture—about the worst thing that could happen to anyone.

And are these ardent, trusting youths and maidens everywhere repulsed during their quest throughout the

film colony? No; there remain some organisations which welcome them with open arms. Hollywood's scheme for the hospitable reception of her guests includes the modest unofficial casting bureau, the school of movie acting, with its cheering discovery that "A Thousand Girls Are Wanted for the Movies Right Now", and the still more modest studio, where, as predicted with uncanny accuracy by the "acting school", the beginner is, sure enough, given a small test part in front of what appears to be a camera. The fees may seem high at all three places, but it is doubtless a reasonable price to pay for the brilliant future they guarantee, and at any rate they all work together in close co-operation for the welfare of those whose interests they have at heart.

So close, indeed, is that co-operation that one young girl who paid a fee at a movie-acting school, in the morning, encountered exactly the same official when she was asked to pay another fee at a recommended studio in the afternoon.

THE PLAYERS.

"My mother begged me not to become an actress."

"She got her wish!"—"The Show Boat."

1. *Early Technique.*

"How I could ven my hands vos tied?" the little victim is said to have protested, when impatiently asked by the police why he hadn't yelled for help. Similarly, gesture was everything to those ex-stage actors, suddenly cut off from the realm of words, whose services were enlisted for early films—gesture even more marked than in the theatre of their day, wherein Irving was wont to herald his lines by stamping his right foot smartly on the ground.

It was required, maybe, to film a love story, and of course we must faithfully adhere to our author, following the slavish convention of those times. How, then, were we to translate to celluloid that unfortunate little incident of the hero's early and inexperienced days, when, tentatively whispering a piece of gallantry in a fair charmer's ear, he apparently "woke the wrong passenger"?

. . . . "The girl flushed hotly, and a ringing slap rent the still morning air"

It is said that bookmakers on English racecourses employ confederates who, by a system of hand signals known as "tick-tacking", transmit important information from distant parts of the field. If so, the essence of these turf messages would be their secrecy. The tick-tackers of early films, on the contrary, necessarily had to contort themselves with a view to being readily understood by any spectators who had taken the trouble to learn a simple code. A few exercises from my old instruction-book are

quoted for guidance. The third example may awaken some memories:—

Heaven knows!—The hands are held close to the waist, the palms being slowly turned outwards. At the same time the shoulders are raised to touch the ears, and the mouth pouts strongly.

Ae defae you!—The girl stands with right leg stiffly advanced in front of her, arms tightly folded over the breast, head smartly tossed over the left shoulder.

I reject your proposition.—The hero brings his hands slowly up to touch his chest, close together, and with palms outwards, head turned away to the right. The hands are then very smartly jerked apart, roughly as in the breast stroke of swimming.

Leave instantly, or I shall ring for Mother.—The girl stands stiffly erect, head raised high, left hand tightly clenched. She takes a slight step backwards as with her outstretched right arm she points to a door plainly marked "Way Out." A sub-title in very large letters spells "GO!"

Simultaneously with these exacting callisthenics, the most vigorous facial movements were necessary, and prospective film actors appearing for a test would be asked to "register" every kind of emotion, and in some cases even to register two at once—amusement on the left side of the face, and rage on the other. Comedians like Gribouille and Polidor would be chosen solely on account of the effectiveness of the close-up faces they could furnish for the camera. It will easily be gathered that film acting was somewhat exhausting work, and that after a few minutes of it the players were glad to rest while their aching faces were treated with embrocation.

Nominally they were supposed, throughout the conversation parts of the film, to speak actual lines in the sense of the sub-titles, but many interesting revelations

were made, when the picture was exhibited, by spectators who had learned the lip-reading system for the deaf.

I have consistently maintained that it is a serious error to confuse the quite separate and distinct branches of technique applicable to the stage and the film, and to postulate that the cinema actor must artificially make a part by set rules, instead of allowing a natural play of his emotions. These early film stars, as has been seen, were obliged to outdo the already exaggerated gesticulation of the pre-Robertson stage, in an attempt to compensate for the supposed handicap of speechlessness. Misconception on this point still prevails, and when lecturing on Dramatic Art I am aware that my audience are reluctant to agree that there is any essential difference in the two forms of acting. With the reader's kind leave, I will momentarily depart from reminiscence, to touch on some of the arguments I usually advance.

The presenting of a stage play, even after producer and scenic artists have done their best, is left to players in action and in relation. The players are essential because in the theatre the telling of the story absolutely depends from them (and every member of the cast will require to be familiar with the whole of the play). But nothing of the kind happens in films, where such unfolding is the province of the cameraman and director from beginning to end, human actors being then of secondary importance as optional components of the setting. The Drama is a mirror held to Nature, but the stage actor cannot possibly find his work natural to himself, if it is to appear so to the audience (since studied technique is needed in conveying even the most artless and natural impression in front of the footlights). In this perhaps unconventional view I am supported by Dame Sybil Thorndike—or rather, I have the honour to support her.

With the foregoing, on the other hand, we have to reconcile the complete manner in which Eliiston, Vyvyan

and others submerged themselves in their stage character. The incurable cripple, who so remarkably banished his affliction while under the influence of the rôle he was playing, did at least find that he could hardly crawl to his dressing-room afterwards. But Elliston, after the final curtain of "The Coronation", imagined himself still a king in reality, and addressed the Drury Lane audience as though they were his subjects.

I would compare the position with that of a man A who has been asked to fasten the dress-tie of his friend B. If he does this correctly, the process will appear perfectly natural, both to B and to any onlookers, but must feel awkward to A, because it is to him only an inverted reflection of the real.

2. *Veteran Players.*

Who can remember Lillian Walker's dimples, John Bunny's tribulations under the hatchet-faced Flora Finch, Maurice Costello in *The Thanksgiving Cake*, Miss Daphne Wayne's curious habit of twisting her mouth, and the equally characteristic "Harry Carey hitch"?

We shall never again see the hero of the Bunny comedies, nor those of *Ultus*, *The Little Café* and *Fatty at Coney Island*,* but the "Little Colonel" of *Birth of a Nation* is still on the screen, and yet more remarkable, Miss Chrissie White, the charming heroine of the 1934 re-filming of *General John Regan*, has been a leading lady since 1906!! This almost incredible record challenges longevity on the stage, and I doubt whether it has ever been equalled in films. Amongst the men, Russell Simpson appears to have started one year later.

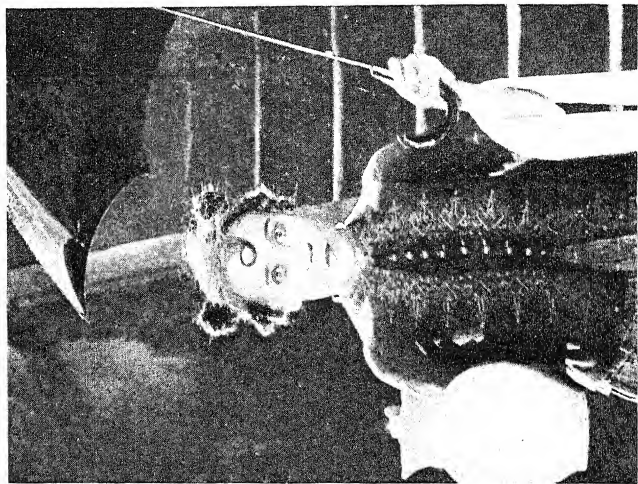
Players who have been presented on the screen throughout a period of 25 years, although not necessarily without a break in service, include the undermentioned. Quite possibly there are others, as the ladies are apt to be reticent

* Aurele Sydney, Max Linder and Roscoe Arbuckle.

TYPES OF PLAYERS: Lover, Comédienne



RODOLPHO VALENTINO.

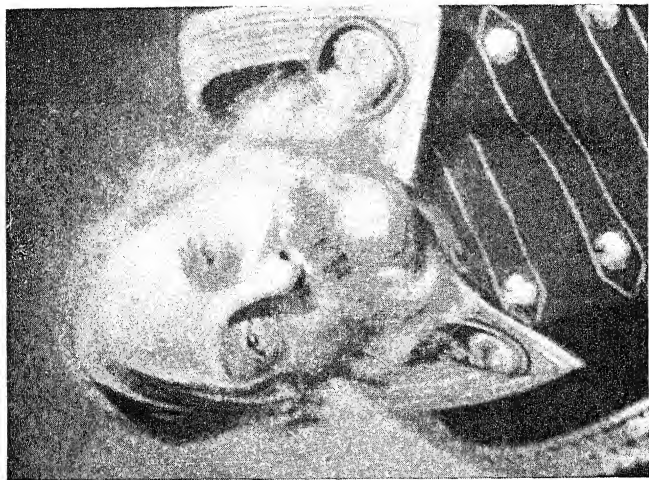


LOUISE FAZENDA.



LON CHANEY.

PL. VIII.



EMIL JANNINGS.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

in the matter, apparently preferring to let such by-gones be by-gones:—

Kate Bruce	Lionel Barrymore
Bebe Daniels	George Bellamy
Helen Hayes	Hobart Bosworth
Mary Pickford	James Kirkwood
Blanche Sweet	Harry Myers
Chrissie White	Russell Simpson

And these are included in the number who have had 20 years:—

Signe Auen	Noah & Wallace Beery
Eugénie Besserer	Francis Xavier Bushman
Alice Brady	Charles Chaplin
Evelyn Brent	Douglas Fairbanks
Ethel Clayton	William Farnum
Marie Dressler	Francis Ford
Lillian Gish	Alec B. Francis
Bessie Love	Lucien Littlefield
Mae Marsh	Harold Lloyd
Claire McDowell	Tom Mix
Anna Q. Nilsson	Guy Newall
Norma Talmadge	Stewart Rome
Alma Taylor	George Summerville
	Henry B. Walthall
	H. B. Warner
	Bryant Washburn

3. *The Development of the Star System.*

As I have already mentioned, it was early found that film plays required a feminine interest—generally speaking, a pretty girl heroine—and the enormous majority of ordinary entertainment pictures have included her, to this day. Isolated suggestions hazarded to Boards of movie financiers from time to time, that this recipe was not essential, have been met with a stunned silence, pleasantly broken by the musical ripple of Hebrew laughter. In this connection the magnates have apparently been justified by the public taste

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during 25 years; but a heroine is one thing, and a star is quite another.

The American Biograph Company were quite willing to arrange for Florence Lawrence, Blanche Alexander and little Gladys Smith to flit gracefully about the screen, since this was what the doctor ordered, but they refused to divulge these players' names, maintaining that their identities were no concern of the public. Some years ago I obtained a very early positive of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which there was no mention whatever that Little Eva was played by Miss Gladys Smith (a stage player from David Belasco's "Good Little Devil" company), subsequently known as Mary Pickford. The Americans knew her merely as "Biograph Mary", just as Gaumont's favourite child player had to pass as "Bobby".

The English, who had considerable influence at that time, were dissatisfied with this arrangement, as the public liked these players and wished to make pets of them. The AB Company were therefore obliged to circulate large photographs, which are still displayed in the lobbies of certain old British cinemas, bearing fictitious names, such as "Miss Muriel Fortescue" (the late Mabel Normand), "Miss Daphne Wayne" (Blanche "Sweet"), "Willie McBain" (the late Bobby Harron), and "Miss Dorothy Nicholson" ("Mary Pickford"), and the English practice was soon reflected in the States. First a well-liked character, e.g. Mary, Bobby, Winkle, Pimple, the This Girl and the That Girl; then a popular idol, with real name, age, weight and starting price all revealed to the public and carefully overhauled yearly, the girls' ages gradually increasing as the square root of the distance.

The early heroes will be mentioned in Chapter IX. Some of the ladies are as here follow:—

"Mutual Girl"—Norma Philips.

"Thanhouser Kid"—Marie Eline.

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"Biograph Girl"—Florence Lawrence.

Heroines of Kalem and Edison—Gene Gauntier & Mary Fuller.

"Tilly Girls"—Alma Taylor and Chrissie White.

If the star system is possible on the movies, thought Adolph Zukor and Charles Frohman, why not offer a film career to some who are already famous on the stage? As a preliminary venture, they bought up a film of Queen Elizabeth which the Divine Sarah had been induced to make in France, and an amusing story is told of how they paced up and down in their office for over an hour, lacking the moral courage to open the precious parcel for which they had staked many, many shekels.

Then Nat Goodwin was filmed in *Oliver Twist*, and James A. Hackett in *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Famous Players had started: the future of the Star System was brilliant.

4. *Contests for Fame and Fortune.*

I hope the reader will forgive the seeming contradictions in this book, but the cinema is full of the strangest paradoxes.

One of the most puzzling of these is that, while there is virtually no prospect whatever for new aspirants, we find a constant alleged demand for fresh stars. Needless to say, it did not long suffice that they were imported ready-made from the stage, and producing companies, in collusion with the Press, display continuous activity in their search for talent, or perhaps, rather, for novel appeal. A particularly deplorable form of shanghai-ing is practised by 'scouts' from the studios, who, on catching sight of a girl who takes their fancy in some way or another, will entice her into throwing up some perfectly honourable and steady form of employment, in exchange for the questionable worthiness of the shadow stage. On this point, again, I am not writing from hearsay.

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"Stars" are, strictly speaking, those favourite players who constitute in themselves the attraction and publicity value of a film, the story being, in such instance, merely a vehicle for displaying them before the public; but featured players are often loosely termed "stars". Let us give a moment's consideration to the methods by which they are selected and captured.

Stars may be young, or they may be quite elderly, and either male or female, but there can be little doubt that the typical and most popular notion is a young and beautiful girl. The latter kind seem to appeal to the widest public, and as they are definitely in the majority, they must be treated accordingly in these pages, just as I am obliged, in spite or because of international outlook, to pay most frequent attention to the country that produces 87 per cent. of the world's films.

The heroine or ingénue is therefore the basis of the star system, and will usually be found to have been selected for unusual beauty combined with an almost impossibly innocent and unsophisticated appearance. Cowboys, especially, like 'em helpless. A heckled stage critic once protested, in self-defence, that he had merely treated the chorus, plot and jokes with the respect due to age; but on the screen the heroine is genuinely young (neglecting such exceptional cases as Fanny Ward and Nazimova), and until recently her innocence of the big city was alarming. If in real life young girls were so perilously untaught, there would certainly be questions in Parliament about it.

I once encountered an educated girl of 25 who thought the sun and the moon were the same thing, save for a change of appearance and name at night; a Polish acquaintance shewed similar haziness, and in England a young friend, who was taking his first trip to London, asked me if he would be able to get his snapshots developed there. I assured him that there was now a go-ahead chemist's shop in the High Street.

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But it is a commonplace that some people are not as guileless as they pretend. A. W. J——, an old friend, had confided to my temporary care a young girl who was a stranger to London (he said), and I promised to shew her 'round the town in my justly admired fashion.

I don't remember what we did all day, but one incident stands out with deadly clearness. We were for some reason in Oxford Street, near Tottenham Court Road Station—perhaps on the site where, twenty years previously, the earliest filmgoers sat in an imitation railway carriage to see Hale's Tours—and I suggested that we should go to Piccadilly Circus for tea. The girl was saucer-eyed at the prospect of going on the merry-go-rounds there, but I hastily dispelled that impression, and delivered myself somewhat after this manner:—"Now, my dear, we will wait here, to take what is known as a motor-omnibus, and you will be so interested to see it going without a horse."

At this effort the artless damsel suddenly shed her pose, and tersely snapped: "No 'bus goes from here to Piccadilly Circus!"¹

Well, as we were saying . . . Youth and Beauty are usually essential to the ingénue, and ignorance can sometimes be acquired with careful study. Here is her description in Mr. Elmer Rice's somewhat severe exposé of film conventions:—²

I saw the head of a young and beautiful girl, who peered at us coyly. A strange, disembodied voice spoke in curiously impersonal accents: 'For nineteen summers Pansy Malone grew among the verdant fields of Purilia, a lovely unspoiled child of nature'.

She was—as the voice had indicated—indeed a lovely creature . . . Barefoot and dressed in well-fitting rags, she leaned daintily upon the handle of a rake (which, upon reflection, struck me as a little odd, for it was scarcely the season for haying).

¹ A surprising fact. It was quite news to me

² *Pur.*, p. 38.

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A closer scrutiny, however, raised many puzzling doubts as to the accuracy of the descriptive announcement . . . Her person seemed to belie a life of arduous toil and exposure to the elements. Although she was hatless, her skin was snowy and unblemished. Her lips were small bows of unusual perfection, and each eyelash stiffly proclaimed its individual existence. Her hair, which was literally a mass of golden ringlets, might well have been proclaimed a triumph of tonsorial art. The hand which clasped the rake (as well as the other hand, which fingered the hem of her charmingly tattered dress) was soft and white, and the finger-nails were well-shaped and beautifully polished and tinted. And I was not a little surprised to observe that the dainty toes, that nestled modestly in the grass, were handsomely manicured, too.*

Actually, a large proportion of these ingénues have been merely good-looking working girls—hoi pretty polloi, if you like—who wished to become Hollywoodnymphs, and obtained their first chance through winning one of the countless varieties of that damnable institution, the beauty contest. The advent of talkies is popularly supposed to have brought about an enormous rush of young players to join schools and night-classes, but it is painfully evident that hundreds have not yet been able to obtain admission. It is also manifest that a win in a beauty competition would not now go far towards obtaining a talking picture engagement.

Not that I think it ever did count for much. I have in my records the name of every successful competitor in a huge publicity campaign all over the United States, involving a prize of a film engagement and a guaranteed star career to one girl in every state. The girls were duly chosen, and made a grand tour throughout America, with state receptions everywhere, but it would be useless to give

For a 1936 example, observe the beautifully-kept hands of the barefoot, tattered street urchin in "Modern Times."

the list of embryo celebrities, as readers would not have heard of one of them. Of course, a definite and lasting contribution towards the art of Drama may receive recognition, and well-merited success has crowned the efforts of a certain girl who can say "Boop boop-a-doop", whereas her competitors merely say "Ho-de-Hi-de-Ho".

Somewhat resembling the beauty or "fame and fortune" competition is the Popularity Vote scheme, almost equally ill-conceived. Both kinds have been associated with the most discreditable incidents, and occasionally seem to have been launched with the basest motives. In the latter type of contest the public are invited, through the Press, to vote for their favourite actor or actress.

A ballot of this kind was held in England in 1915, and following on the tremendous popularity of the Hepworth film, *Comin' through the Rye*, Miss Alma Taylor was returned at the head with 156,800 votes. In a very big affair organized in 1920-21 by Brewster Publications, New York, Miss Mary Pickford was the winner, with over 158,000 votes (a strangely similar figure!), and 115 others received from 65 to 94,000. For reasons which will presently be apparent, I do not propose to give further statistics; nor would they be of general interest.

5. *Star Worship.*

Registrar:—Any previous husbands?

Miss Fliqueuse:—I'll say! What's the idea — memory test?—*Humorist*, London.

"It was a sorry day for the art of the motion picture when the star system came into being . . . Everything which comprises motion pictures has been sacrificed to it"
—*Motion Picture Magazine*, February, 1923.

Is it not written that we came into the world with nothing, and it is certain we shall carry nothing out? Never mind: it's great fun being a film idol, during the

three years or so that this blissful state lasts, and we shall be fools if we don't take advantage of it, and make hay while the star shines. We can hardly be expected to worry about whether the system is beneficial to films, or such rot as Art for Art's Sake. You might as well have Bridge for Bridge's sake. (Enthusiasts tell us it's a grand game—really intellectual and worth-while—but of course there's nothing in it unless you play for money).

It's all so much more exciting and unconventional than the stuffy formality of the superseded stage. Who ever heard of Irving auctioning things at a bazaar, or Duse judging at a suburban Pally de Danse? The *Court Circular* used to announce "Sir Henry had the honour of dining with Her Majesty last night", but there were never bright, intimate little headlines like "The Tarzans make it up again."¹

Everybody will go crazy about us (especially those who haven't far to go); hats, dolls, scents and dishes will be named for us (or "after us", as the English say); our pet dogs will be photographed and our children will be kidnapped. The Publicity staff will do their best to give tactful answers to the fans' awkward questions: "Where were they educated? What was their previous dramatic training?", and will lose no possible opportunity of bringing us before the public in every capacity, even arranging for our personal appearance in a stage play² as a special attraction, in which case it must be hoped we won't be required to act or speak. And if that supercilious fellow Doyle asks us "Do you like Kipling?" (hoping we won't know what it means), we shall frankly admit, with a disarming smile, that we just haven't had time to learn how to kipple yet, but it happens we are throwing a \$20,000 party at the Bowl next week, to introduce the sport to Hollywood (That'll impress him!).

¹ London daily paper. April, 1934.

² Only too often: but what kind of stage play can it have been?

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And yet it was formerly supposed that one couldn't
"make a silk purse . . ."

* * *

Rightly or wrongly, a good deal of public attention is given to these three-year-plan immortals, but despite some mild surprise at the people's choice of a deity, we need not feel envy at the career and the enormous salary which in the great majority of cases are enjoyed for a very short season. At the zenith of their popularity, these ornaments receive such an excess of publicity that they are obliged to keep their telephone numbers secret. Thousands of silly girls forward the conventional quarter-dollar with a request for a photograph (and I have known stars mean enough to neglect to send it), but on the other hand bitter jealousy and formidable malice are incurred no less frequently.

As illustrating the mentality of some of them (the mediocre kind, admittedly), I have never overheard anything more apt than a snatch of conversation in the Universal restaurant. It cannot be denied that this place is very noisy, being at all times crowded with those vessels that are reputed to make the most sound. One girl was bellowing to another, complaining that she couldn't hear herself speak, upon which her loyal companion instantly and shrewdly retorted: "You don't miss a stack!"

In a very few months' time, such specimens will be swept into the obscurity whence they came, and would give anything for a recurrence of the blackmailers' and kidnappers' threats which once denoted success. If they are at all intelligent, they will have feathered their own and their friends' nests at the expense of the industry, during their short term of office. It is said that a favourite Lancashire actress has cleverly obtained engagements for nearly all her numerous relatives, and is still searching for fresh Fields to add to her achievement. If this talented and charming artist will forgive the absurd comparison, so is it with the

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clay-footed idols of Hollywood. When once they obtain influence in the studio, and box-office value, it is easier to extinguish an outbreak in a fireproof building (as my friend Professor Low says); less labour to remove the tarnish from stainless cutlery, than to stem the flow of their sisters, cousins and grandmothers on to the set.

Now let us consider the effect on the films themselves, and the statement which heads this chapter. (It is significant that this quotation, far from representing merely the jaundiced view of a hostile country, is from a New York magazine). Everything has indeed been sacrificed to this extraordinary convention, even up to the present time, when about 75 per cent. of pictures are devised and stories prostituted to fit an individual star. The wretched makeshift which would put in *Bohème* a sweet simple girl, justly famed for innocent rôles—and therefore ever condemned to them—and make *Faust* with a feminine star, is an entire fallacy and contradiction. It has never even tolerably justified itself, from the earliest days.

Our favourite actor should be the one who does the best work, and we can all remember many an excellent sequence by an obscure extra player, long after the rest of the film is merciful oblivion. I recall, as clearly as though it were last week, a short and probably incidental passage in a picture of at least 25 years ago. I can hardly hope that any reader will be able to assist me to identify the film, of which the title, story and principal players are utterly obliterated, but I know that it was a Lubin production, because of the characteristic bell.*

The scene was the counter of an assay office in a gold-mining town, where the prospectors were in the habit of bringing their ore for test. A crazy-looking man rushed in, excitedly tendering a large nugget on which he wanted an opinion. The clerk politely mastered his amusement at the sight of a glittering chunk of about five pounds

* Please see page 19.

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weight, which the man seriously imagined to be solid gold. He patiently explained that it was iron pyrites, the "fool's gold" that various people had been bringing in all day since the office opened . . . Sorry!

The man slowly staggered out, disheartened, leaving the worthless mass with the clerk. As the door closed behind the disillusioned miner, the official permitted himself a cynical grin. Reflectively he tossed the lump in his hand, and was about to pitch it into the waste-paper basket.

Then somehow it caught his eye, and he inspected it more closely

I shall never forget the gradual change in his face.

It was a remarkable, a perfect piece of work, a whole story dramatically told in 90 seconds, and I often wonder what happened to the assay clerk, and whether he became a famous star. Quite likely he was victimized sooner or later, as many have been, for contributing the dominating performance in a picture officially "bulling on" someone else.

Competence of this order would be a welcome innovation in many of our film stars; but even so, the screen is no place for an individual display of acting: by its very nature it must confine stardom to the director.

Instead of encouraging the futile type system, we should remember that one man in his time plays many parts. What is the use of throwing suspicion on a certain character in a murder mystery, when we know full well that he is the eternal stock hero, and that the stock villain must obviously be convicted in the end?

Another detestable fruit of the system is the unscrupulous "cashing-in" on stars' popularity. Passing over the ugly rumours concerning the disposal of the Valentino memorial funds, I would mention the questionable use of what are known in America as "warmed-over movies". A player is induced to join another company, who make

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him a star and a powerful box-office attraction. The previous company, under whom he had only very small parts, now re-issue those early films, advertising the newly-made star as the principal player and chief attraction, and thus obtaining money by false pretences, as they do not disclose the fact that it is an out-of-date film, originally intended to "feature" someone quite different.

The identities and private characteristics of players should be no concern of the audience, and yet everything possible is done to flaunt those vulgar shortcomings which it would seem elementary charity to hide. Stardom has been offered to at least three girls solely because they had attained undesirable notoriety (one was expelled from school for writing a smutty book; one was involved in a murder case; the third made her private lives so public that even Hollywood resounded with them).

During one of the colony's "foreign" crazes, a German Jew obtained success just by posing as a Spaniard. Others, happily, are admired for more valid reasons, but in any case their most intimate secrets are probed by the newspapers and displayed before the vulgar gaze. In a recent news reel we were shewn a parrot which, as its owner proudly demonstrated, could make a noise like Eddie Cantor—an affliction which I should have thought might have yielded to prompt treatment.

The unceasing interest taken by the public in those personal characteristics which bear on a player's art, e.g. girth around the chest, and weight in pounds, gives no little work to studios and film magazines. In an effort to dam this flood of enquiries, some newspapers publish an encyclopædia giving such details in respect of about 4,000 players, together with a representative selection of films and marriages in which they have appeared. Fans who make a personal visit to Hollywood are, naturally enough, taken in hand by tourist agencies who profess to shew the

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interesting sights and to give any desired information about the stars.

Unfortunately, their data are not always very reliable or up-to-date, and I remember one instance in which the cicerone of a sight-seeing coach (locally termed "rubber-neck 'bus") was unaware that a certain imposing-looking white building, formerly the residence of the Gish sisters, had passed into the possession of two middle-aged and very extensive ladies from Iowa. As they drove by, this domain he therefore announced as usual: "Now on my right, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have the home of Lillian and Dorothy Gish, and there they are, sitting on the verandah."

As the old-time novel had it—there was a sickening thud . . . and then silence!

For a few seconds the horrified fans received this bulletin unprotestingly. Then an awed voice came from a back seat—"My God, how they've grown!"

6. *All-Star Casts.*

"When everybody's somebody, then no one's anybody," wrote Sir William Gilbert, and an all-star picture, having no stars, has some chance of being a film, and not a "starring vehicle". The world's celluloid masterpieces will, in fact, generally be found to come within the category of non-star productions—*Quo Vadis?*, *Intolerance*, *'way Down East*, *Caligari*, *Miracle Man*, *Greed*. *Battleship Potemkin* had a duty towards films and their spectators too important to allow of glorifying an individual.

As the stage actor of his "Hamlet", so boasts the screen veteran of having appeared in the mighty cast of *Intolerance*, which included, amongst others "too numerous to mention", Mae Marsh, Miriam Cooper, Margery Wilson, Signe Auen, Carol Dempster, Winifred Westover, Mildred Harris, Bessie Love, Kate Bruce, Lillian and Dorothy

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Gish, Norma and Constance Talmadge—each one a famous name; Robert Harron, William Farnum, Elmo Lincoln, H. B. Walthall, Tully Marshall, von Stroheim, H. B. Warner and, I believe, Wallace Reid and Harry Myers

Later on, in 1921, celebrated players in unusual number were engaged for *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* and *The Affairs of Anatol*, and thus it will be seen that the publicity announcement of *Grand Hôtel* (which included Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, Wallace Beery, Lewis S. Stone, John and Lionel Barrymore) was somewhat wide of the mark when it advertised this talking picture of 1931 as having the greatest all-star cast on record.

There is now practically no limit in that respect, and I noticed that *Only Yesterday* (Universal, 1933) was claimed to assemble 93 stars.

7. *Plain Tales from the Beverly Hills.*

How contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such insects! "And yet," (says he) "I dare engage, these creatures have their little ambitions and vanities; they contrive nests and burrows that they call houses and cities; they make a figure in dress and equipage; they love, they fight, they dispute, they cheat, they betray!"—Transcribed from *A Voyage to Brobdingnag*, Chapter III.

From quite early times, it seems, the public have constantly taken an interest in personal anecdotes of well-known authors and artists. To this day we smile at the recollection of many an alleged incident from the lives of the great—whether true or merely *ben trovato*—the devastating rudeness of Tennyson and Dr. Johnson; Bernhardt retiring to contemplate her coffin; Garrick warning Mrs. Siddons that she would have no chance on the Stage; Meyerbeer's delight at hearing his compositions massacred on a barrel-organ; J. L. Toole explaining to the infuriated pawnbroker, whom he had knocked up at 2 a.m. to

enquire the time: "Well, you have my watch!" We read that Chopin, tactlessly dragged to the piano by a Parisian profiteer who had given him dinner, whimsically protested "*Mais je n'ai pas tant mangé!*"; but in our own time we can remember Jimmy Glover, conductor at Drury Lane, so big that it was maliciously rumoured the street urchins used to take advantage of his shadow, to shelter from the sun.

And so to-day, should we not welcome similar *bons mots* bearing on the virtuosi of the screen? Well, personally, charming though I know many of the players to be, I have little stomach for the efforts of their press agents. Nevertheless I propose to stifle that prejudice to the extent of generously contributing two anecdotes, entirely free from embroidery, and guaranteed to be not merely true but typical.

They are plain tales—so plain as to be almost ugly—and the second example, as far as I am aware, has never before been published in extenso.

A. "They had asked for public attention, and they got it."—*Photoplay Magazine*, March, 1925.

A poor and humble bar-tender became a great success in pictures, was idolized and had a salary quite incommensurate with reason or commonsense.

On the 6th March, 1917, a hotel dinner given in his honour was immediately followed by a disgusting party at a road-house in Woburn, Mass. Whereas the prime cost of this early breakfast, with diversions, was \$1,000, payments which were subsequently found to be necessary brought the bill to \$101,050. Nevertheless, on the 12th July, 1921—for Hollywood seethes with disloyalty and treachery—the facts were divulged in the newspapers. The circumstance that they had been suppressed for four years formed a major scandal in political and official circles.

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Despite the apparently substantial and durable nature of this publicity, it was thought necessary to arrange for another similar celebration in September, 1921, *less than two months later*, at the St. Francis Hôtel, San Francisco. This party was an even greater success, to the somewhat untutored minds of the film fraternity, although by educated and cultured people it would have been deemed a bestial parade of depravity.

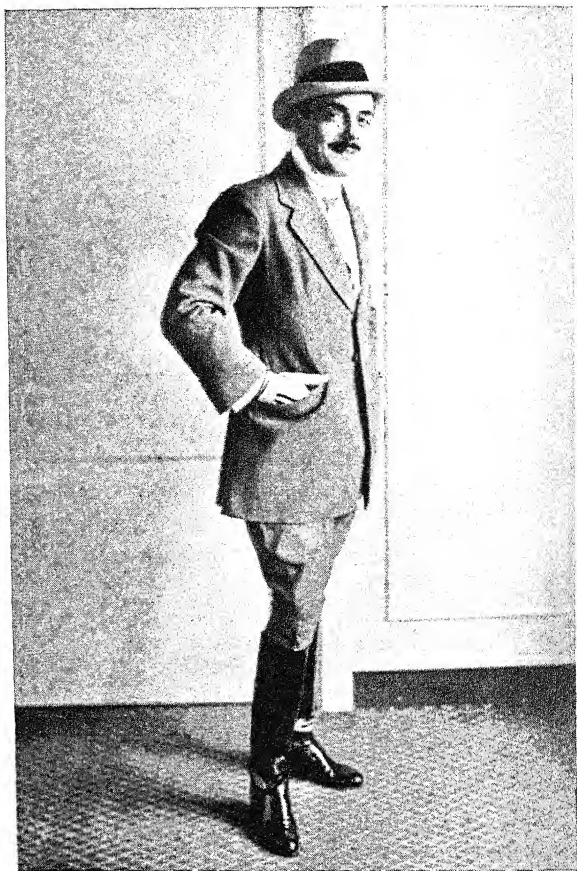
A young actress succumbed to what has been cautiously described as "an acute pelvic disorder", indisputably contracted at this party, and it was utterly out of the question to keep the whole affair from the knowledge of the police. A screen player surrendered to them and was tried on a charge of manslaughter—theoretically punishable with 20 years' imprisonment.

Here was undoubtedly a case of all hands to the wheel, if the industry's fair name were to be saved. A hundred thousand dollars would not avail much now, and everything conceivable had to be done, on a bold scale, to hush things up and secure a verdict of "not guilty". Prominent authors were paid to write that, after investigation, they were satisfied that the reports were unfounded.

At a third trial the accused was acquitted, but otherwise the oceans of whitewash were used in vain. The facts were indeed exceedingly difficult to explain away, or even to demonstrate as exceptional in film circles, and the public were hostile and uncompromising. The most tragic aspect was that the Women's Freedom League definitely vetoed the shewing of films costing hundreds of thousands of dollars to make.

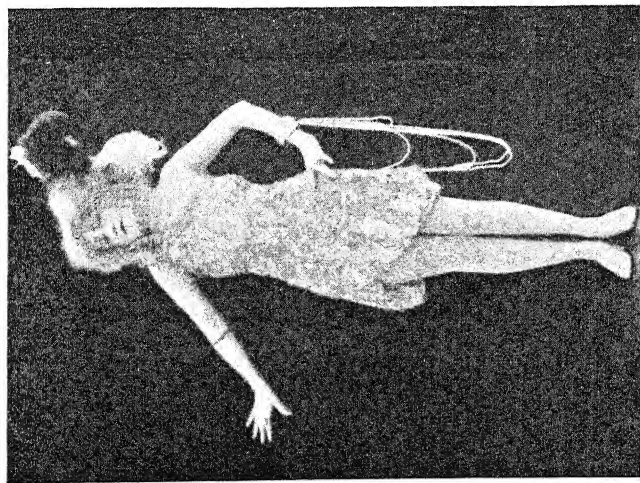
The actor, although officially exonerated and probably no more blameworthy than the others, was obliged to retire from films. Making good in another capacity, he led an honourable and useful existence until his death recently.

The incident had an effect that will be traceable for fifty years, and therefore I need not apologize for disinterr-



MAX LINDER.

THE STAR SYSTEM



1907—FLORENCE TURNER,
the first film star.



1934—KATHARINE HEPBURN.

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ing it. Besides, it is the especial desire of the stars that their off-duty pastimes should be revealed to the world.

B. *A Stepping-Stone to Higher Things.*

In the great Popularity Contest of 1921, the winner (as already mentioned) was Miss Mary Pickford, but she was very closely followed by two beautiful and talented girls of Irish-Jewish descent. These sisters possessed remarkable screen personalities, and had been trained by D. W. Griffith, and so their popularity was not surprising. The time came when the elder sister was returned as the favourite leading lady in American films—which practically means, in the world.

The worst of being on a pinnacle is that the only possible movement is downward. A rival pair of sisters appearing on the horizon, it chanced that our dark-haired beauty's prestige was seriously menaced by the elder of these,* and that finally the newcomer, as the result of her acting and dancing in the film of a very popular story, was elected as their favourite star by the college students of the United States.

Most unfortunate, for the Irish-Jewish girls had spent a great deal of money on advertising (and publicity is essential in such matters). Happily they were not bereft of wealth and influence.

Naturally unassuming though the Americans may be, they are bound to recognize that international screen fame is unattainable except in Hollywood, by however talented a player, but that there might well exist in Europe numbers of young people who would make good if only they had influential friends to give them a start in a Pacific Coast studio.

During the winter of 1922-23, through the great generosity of two ladies who themselves had attained almost unparalleled success in American pictures, such a chance was

* Sixtieth on the 1921 list—long ago forgotten.

placed at the disposal of a British girl, to be selected by careful test. The two Hollywood stars came to London and examined hundreds of photos sent by competitors. The field was narrowed down to one hundred girls, and experts subjected them to a thorough and decisive screen test.

I must admit that after viewing some of the test strips I should personally have selected a girl other than the one who was eventually chosen; however, it is quite likely that I was mistaken. Words cannot describe the publicity that was given to the final adjudication. The name of the fortunate winner was announced at the Albert Hall, London, in the presence of Royalty, and the daily newspapers were full of the event. The Trade publications, however, such as the *Kinematograph Weekly*, were not favourably disposed towards the scheme.

I had recently arrived in London, and was due to interview the embryo star at her home near Marble Arch. It was no business of mine to attempt to dissuade her against going to Hollywood, and I am afraid I could hardly have succeeded in any such mission. However, I cannot say what might have happened, but through the miscarriage of a letter the interview did not materialise.

I will not give a detailed account of the adulation which was poured upon the girl, both before and after her arrival in the States, and in fact the rest of the story calls for the tersest possible disposal. She was provided with a luxury suite in the *ss. Aquitania*, and was joined by her parents. Strictly according to contract, she was given a part in one film, but to those who have anything like an intimate acquaintance with Hollywood, it will not come as a stunning surprise to learn that she was never made a star. Stranded in California, and too proud to return to England covered with ridicule, she vainly sued the promoters of the scheme, who were able to plead that she was "unsuitable" for a star contract.

Miss Iris Barry has written, regarding this unfortunate victim of circumstances, that she failed because the public "recognised her for what she was". I greatly regret having to contradict Miss Barry, but here I am afraid she quite misses the point (as thousands must have done). I trust she will take it as a compliment if I suggest that at that time she knew of Hollywood nothing more than she deemed it necessary or palatable to know.

8. *Players of Outstanding Quality.*

"The Play's the Thing", even on the stage, and as Gordon Craig has pointed out, a wonderful part for an individual player is frequently obtained at the expense of good dramatic writing.* Carefully watching the growth of films through the years, we must perforce conclude that they are still less appropriately the medium for the personal triumph of a player, and indeed that they can quite well dispense with actors and actresses altogether.

The Star system being apparently immutable, however, let us be grateful for the leaven of playing genius which has saved many an otherwise intolerable photo-play. Tritons out of water though they may have been, the undermentioned, amongst others, will be remembered for their outstanding work in films which every now and then have allowed them to excel (for the star is made by the director, and not, following the popular delusion, by the public):—

Germany.—Elisabeth Bergner and Pola Negri.

Bernhard Goetzke, Emil Jannings, Rudolf Klein-Rogge, Werner Krauss and Conrad Veidt.

Sweden.—Greta Gustafsson. Tore Svenborg.

France.—Bernhardt, Mmc. Falconetti, Napierkowska, Réjane and Nadia Sibirskaja.

Max Linder and Séverin-Mars.

* e.g. Sir Henry Irving's triumph in "The Bells."

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England.—Ellaline Terriss, Ellen Terry, Lady Tree and Betty Balfour.

Gerald du Maurier, Forbes-Robertson, Seymour Hicks, Matheson Lang and Cyril Maude.

(more recently: Cicely Courtneidge, Gracie Fields and Louise Hampton).

America.—Louise Dresser, Marie Dressler, Elsie Ferguson, Pauline Frederick, Nazimova and Za-Su Pitts (also Greta Gustafsson, renamed Garbo).

George Arliss, John and Lionel Barrymore (and very occasionally Ethel), Wallace Beery, Charles Chaplin, Erich von Stroheim and H. B. Walthall.

9. *Screen Favourites between 1909 and 1929.*

The aim of this book is to present the main characteristics, good and bad, of films and film-making, together with a commentary, embracing a range of twenty-five years' history, upon incidents which may be either diverting in themselves or of more than passing interest because their effect is in some way traceable in the photoplay of 1936.

To give a mere list of pictures of the present day would be a useless reduplication of labour which has already been performed: to supply an index of modern players would be to make an encyclopædia in pointless rivalry to the excellent ones now existing. This is not my object, and for similar reasons I do not include very much information on the methods employed in making a photoplay.

Otherwise I see no reason why the book should not be of up-to-date application, and although certain films from the past have been described, it is because they have had their influence on the cinema's development, or shew an interesting comparison with the technique of to-day. In treating of the players, again, I cannot in general do more than select the names of a few leading examples who have been typical of each class.

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Except for the ingénue, who disappears without trace, the screen players of ten and fifteen years ago can fairly easily be identified and located to-day by those who take an interest in their personalities. Therefore there appears no justification for the labour which would be entailed in my making a list of them, even though I am reminded by Press colleagues and others that the public, while they may accept information about the films, greatly prefer gossip concerning the personnel.

Heroes.

The traits of the leading man must indeed have changed with the screen's maturing, for we can remember when, instead of the cheery clip on the ear or hefty stomach-punch which today's heroine confidently expects from James Cagney, Clark Gable or Lee Tracy, girl characters were treated with a quaint chivalry amounting almost to deference. It appears that in mediæval times the knight would raise his visor and doff his right gauntlet in the presence of a lady, and I understand that the ceremony of "raising the hat", depicted in many early films, represents a survival of that practice which actually obtained for a number of years.

Improved technique seems to have banished this incongruity, but I can still remember a picture in which it was seen. Miss Mae Marsh, as a village maiden in *The White Rose* (Griffith, 1923), was approached by two amiable youths who desired her to accompany them to a dance that evening. Lining up at the pretty garden fence, they prefaced their talk by removing their straw hats with the right hand. The girl, if I remember rightly, had an appointment with a young priest (Ivor Novello), and thus was unable to comply. The yokels accepted the situation with a regretful smile, and before tottering off they again raised their hats with a smart click.

Personally I found the effect rather pleasing.

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In 1905 a screen favourite was Arthur Johnson, and in 1907 we had, in addition, Tom Santschi.

1910—Arthur Johnson, Maurice Costello, Francis Xavier Bushman and G. M. Anderson ("Broncho Billy"). Mr. Bushman often appeared afterwards with his wife, Beverley Bayne. He is a veteran credited with 420 films.

1913—William and Duston Farnum and Earle Williams.

1915—William S. Hart and J. Warren Kerrigan.

1918—Wallace Reid, Tom Meighan, Richard Barthelmess, Douglas Fairbanks and Eugene O'Brien.

1922—Wallace Reid, Tom Meighan and Rodolpho Valentino.

1924—John Gilbert.

1925—Ronald Colman.

Later—Ramon Novarro, Clark Gable, Maurice Chevalier and Robert Montgomery.

Italy.—Novelli and Alberto Capozzi.

Russia.—Nicolas Rimsky, M. Lissenko and Ivan Mosjoukine.

Germany.—Paul Richter, Willy Fritsch and Hans von Schlettow.

England.—Clive Brook, Henry Edwards and Stewart Rome.

Sweden.—Gosta Ekman, Tore Svenborg and Nils Asther.

France.—Léon Mathot, André Nox, Jaque Catelain and Signoret.

Villains.

"Please, God, make all the bad people good," says the infant in prayer, thoughtfully adding the rider "... and the good people nice!" There is, indeed, something quite likeable about several of the screen's bad men, for instance Lew Cody and Jack Holt, whereas what character could be more detestable than the Efficient Baxter, *pious Aeneas* of Wodehouse stories?

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Among seasoned "heavies" we number Noah Beery, Jean Hersholt, Warner Oland (the fourteen-lived Eastern menace of so many serials), Walter Long, Philo McCullough, Robert McKim, Stuart Holmes and the late Lowell Sherman, and in British films, Gregory Scott, Shayle Gardner and Cameron Carr; but for an authoritative and comprehensive thesis on villainy it would be hard to rival George Arliss in Molnar's *The Devil*, or Erich von Stroheim ("the man you will love to hate") as the scoundrelly Sergius in *Foolish Wives*.

So far as ladies are concerned, the equivalent is loosely described as a "vamp", which frequently causes confusion between the bad woman and the mere siren. The first film vamp was Miss Alice Hollister, who afterwards reformed to become an orthodox leading lady, and the most famous was the pseudo-Egyptian girl, Theda Bara, born in the shadow of the Ohio pyramids. It is as difficult to imagine Miss Lillian Gish a former "heavy siren", in the old Fine Arts productions, as to realise that the rôle of Cupid constituted the first appearance of that beloved character player, the late Miss Marie Dressler.

A really wicked villainess is Josephine Crowell, famous as the "old dragon", Catherine de Medici, in the Huguenot episode of *Intolerance*, and the same again in *Ashes of Vengeance*.* Other vamps have included Barbara la Marr, Bebe Daniels, Pola Negri, Lilyan Tashman, Louise Glaum, Rosemary Theby and Nita Naldi.

Character Players.

For my face, I don't mind it:

You see, I'm behind it.

It's the fellow in front gets the jar!

It has been rightly said that in Hollywood a pretty face is far less marketable than a picturesque scar or a fine set of wrinkles. The late Lon Chaney (not to mention his

* First Natl., 1922.

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being a fine character actor) made a definite study of hideousness, and looked so awful as to make some of the other players feel quite ill at ease. Indeed it is said that "Esmeralda", in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, was terrified of him. Other anti-beauty specialists who came to mind:—Dick Sutherland, Noah and Wallace Beery, Ben Turpin, David Torrence, Walter Long, Bull Montana and Kalla Pasha; but this is incidental, and I would not imply that character players are necessarily bad-looking except when their part requires it.

They are nearly always thoroughly competent artists of ripe experience, who can play practically any part, and play it well, and in many a film theirs is the most dependable performance. Mr. Charles ("Chic") Sale, although quite young, gives a well-known and remarkable study (amongst others) of an aged provincial, using no make-up except a beard. Kenneth Harlan at the age of eighteen, we are informed,* was required to play opposite his mother as her fiancé or her husband. He did not object even to playing occasionally the part of her father, but when asked to impersonate her grandfather he thought it wise to stop this progression while it was still in its elementary stages.

In theory, every player should be able to take any rôle, and a certain young man who had done his best to share himself 'round in this way, and was somewhat proud of the achievement, asked Miss Alice Terry to inspect a short film in which he had played every one of the parts. Miss Terry agreed to do so, and if possible to enlist the interest of her fiancé, the famous director, Rex Ingram.

The film was duly shewn with all modest enthusiasm: fat women, tall men, children, foreigners—all appeared in turn, and each one had been played by this human compendium. From slightly monotonous, the thing soon became an almost unnerving ordeal.

Then, in a bedroom scene, a rat was observed running

* *Daily Mirror*, London, 25/6/1934.

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from under the wardrobe. The overwrought Alice could not suppress a loud scream . . . I mean to say, it seemed hardly possible . . .

Sometimes an actor must be chosen with reference to his facial appearance, e.g. resemblance to a character in history. "Abraham Lincoln" has been represented, in *The Birth of a Nation*, by Joseph Henabery; in *The Iron Horse* (Fox, 1924), by Charles E. Bull; in *Abraham Lincoln* (First National, 1925), by George Billings; ditto (Mr. Griffith, 1930), by Walter Huston. At the "First Nat" studio, they complained that George Billings was obsessed by his part, even after working hours: "He walks like Lincoln and talks like Lincoln. He wears a Lincoln shawl. He won't be satisfied 'til he's assassinated."

Others have to fulfil some specific requirement, and are known as "talent specials"—the expert baseball player; the boxer, the musician. In *Alias Jimmy Valentine* (Metro, 1920), it was thought desirable to engage a genuine ex-burglar for a close-up view of picking a lock. As is always the case in America, some know-all assistant director complained that the man's touch was clumsy and unprofessional. This unfavourable opinion was not endorsed by Bert Lytell, later in the evening, as his dressing-room lock suggested that the hand had not altogether lost its cunning.

Comedians.

Colonel Selig tells of an early film comedian who, seeking an engagement, approached a very bad-tempered German producer.

"So you vos comiker, ain't it?" growled the surly Teuton. Then, swinging 'round in his chair and bestowing a ferocious glare on the hapless victim, he barked: "Vell, make me laff!"

That must have been a terrible premium for getting a

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job; but actually the lot of the ordinary stage comedian is not much more encouraging, and similarly, though it should not be so, his film confrère generally has to carry everything on his own shoulders. Other actors play a part, which alone is difficult enough, but the funny man has the active and indispensable duty of direct, reply-paid contact with the audience, and of making them laugh, even against their will.

Moreover, in films (under existing conventions) the comedian is at some pains to know when he is successful in being funny. Another anecdote—again a true one, I believe—concerns one of those quasi-guests engaged in a professional capacity to mix with the company at a big reception, and keep them amused. (The expedient is not uncommon in the States). When he judged the time was ripe, the humorist started to earn his dinner, and flattered himself that he had greatly added to the gaiety of the assembly.

After about an hour of really hard work, our wit observed the young son of the house approaching, presumably with a message of warm congratulation. Graciously he sat back and allowed the well-earned praise to trickle over him:—"Please, Mother says will you start being funny now?"

Wise and humane directors will relieve the star comedian of some of his responsibility, by arranging for the film itself to provide a humorous setting, as will be considered presently.

Max Linder, Polidor and M. Prince are the earliest of the great fun-makers I can remember—Continental stars, all three of them—but there must have been another one, about whom I am somewhat hazy, called "Gribouille" in France and "Foolshead" in England. "Wiffles", by the way, was the English name given to Prince, Pathé's second attraction in comedy.

Nought is the Squire when the King is nigh, and it

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must not be considered a reflection on M. Prince's doubtless admirable talent if I confess that we were wont to mark time somewhat impatiently when one of his films was being shewn, ardently hoping that the Company's other star, the incomparable Max Linder, might also be seen later in the same programme. It was evidently a proud day for Pathé when they succeeded in regaining the services of the noted face-maker Polidor, who had been enticed into the employ of an Italian studio (probably Ambrosio—one forgets these immaterial details after 24 years). The occasion was celebrated by the making of a film called *Polidor redevient Jim*—"Polidor becomes Jim again". It was a stupid little picture consisting chiefly of close-ups of Polidor's facial contortions, and, between ourselves, the Company would have done better to direct all their efforts towards keeping Max Linder in France.

In England, Fred Evans appeared in amusing satires on famous stories. His film name was "Pimple". Harry Myers and Harold Lloyd ("Winkle") date from the film birth of Hollywood, namely, 1913 (when, as I have already remarked, *The Squaw Man* was made). Harry was with American Biograph, though, many miles away. His most famous rôle was possibly as the Connecticut Yankee in Fox's celebrated Mark Twain comedy, but he still does excellent work to-day.

Harold Lloyd was a simple country youth, "Lonesome Luke", and he was supported by charming Miss Bebe Daniels, one of the youngest leading ladies on record—a mere child of fourteen, but decidedly pretty and vivacious.

Then we come to Mack Sennett's players in Keystone comedies. Ben Turpin:—When he looks you straight in the face, it's safe to assume that he's speaking to someone else. His decontrolled eyes are the subject of a policy at Lloyds (of which I have seen a copy) to cover the risk of their ever becoming straight again.—Then the unknown comedian of *Twenty Minutes of Love*.—Then Charles

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Chaplin, favourite clown of the movies, and beloved of small boys. A London Jewish music-hall artist, engaged by Mack Sennett and then by Essanay, he learned much from the inimitable Max Linder, who also had arrived in the States. Nearly all of Chaplin's films are unfortunately marred by coarse incident.

Other comedians of decided merit, with a good film sense, include Buster Keaton, Biscot, W. C. Fields and Charles Ruggles.

The varying methods of the funny men may be analysed as follows:—

Active Comedians.

Self-contained, real comedian of the highest order, easily triumphing over the stupidest stories: Max Linder. He stood alone in film humour, I am afraid, and we can only wonder whether we shall ever see his like again. Mr. Chaplin, who knew him well, will confirm what I say.

An expert in film-craft, who elects to be a popular clown: Charles Chaplin. An all-round actor of the highest degree of technical equipment. His technique is, in fact, above reproach, and of extraordinary accuracy. It is useless to say that we think him wasted in vulgarity, as he knows exactly what the public wants, which the rest of us do not know.

Harry Myers and Charlie Ruggles—quite familiar to us.

Biscot—an inimitable French droll, whom I have not seen lately.

Passive Comedians.

John Bunny, Harold Lloyd, Roscoe Arbuckle, Ben Turpin and Buster Keaton.

John Bunny could make very good faces, and he and Fatty Arbuckle presented the amusing situations of a fat man hen-pecked or otherwise in difficulties, from which he finally extricates himself by cunning. Ben Turpin is

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entertaining as the travesty of a conventional hero, particularly as a mock hero of melodrama, or handsome knight speeding to rescue fair lady.

So we see that the comedian may be funny by himself, or he may be made ludicrous by a good picture. Again, he may add greatly though unostentatiously to the entertainment value of a film, or finally—as in the exceptional case of Buster Keaton—neither the comedian nor the background action need be of a laughable nature.

All comedians of the front rank are masters of exact timing and extreme economy of movement, and in accordance with the principle of *ars celare artem*, nothing could in reality be neater than their grossest clumsiness.

Charles Chaplin, as I have said, is an active comedian, although rather of clowning than of pure comedy. He is most particular about having a technically excellent continuity, full of amusing situations *which he himself brings to a head*.

In proof of the unexampled art of Max Linder, on the other hand, I give elsewhere some specimens of the childish plots with which he was content to work. His face was incredibly wicked and his humour indescribable. An intrinsically good American comedy, such as *Seven Years' Bad Luck*, was apt to obscure his genius.

With the two above-mentioned, we must contrast Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton, who are obliged to have a carefully-made play, through which they nonchalantly stroll when everything has been made ready by others. The fact that the Hal Roach comedies are "committee-made collections of gags" has apparently suggested to Mr Paul Rotha that Harold need not be a good actor in order to make them a success. Perhaps I have misread this paragraph in "The Film Till Now", as I imagine Mr. Rotha will agree with me that, on the contrary, a really high degree of technique is essential in so accurately effecting the good-humoured simpleton's interventions. Try it yourselves: it is not easy.

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Harold Lloyd is vividly unconscious of what is going on around him: Buster Keaton is stoically indifferent to it. No trace of vulgarity is ever discernible in their films, especially in the Lloyd ones. Their humour is based on the absurd matching of emotions which are ludicrously incompatible.

It is not actually laughable to go about with an unsmiling and otherwise expressionless face, and it is not particularly subtle humour to shew a horde of Red Indians charging with tomahawks. But in combination with slight and unobtrusive movements, Buster Keaton's resigned expression as he regretfully decides to take some steps against the Indians' attack—this is enough to make a Dean laugh, and involves, as a matter of fact, a very difficult ordeal for the other players in his films.

It is unconventional for girls to receive the custard pies and weltings that constitute the delicate fabric of comedy with some of the men, but two admirable knockabout comediennes are included in Louise Fazenda and Alice Howell, and excellent work of a different kind has been supplied by Za-Su Pitts and Mabel Normand, and in England by Betty Balfour. Constance Talmadge, Dorothy Gish and May Allison were talented leads in comedies and comedy-dramas, the versatile Miss Allison (a noted stage beauty) having been particularly amusing in *Fair and Warmer*.

Child Players.

Dear little things: aren't they sweet, and aren't they knowing? Readers who have met them in real life, as I have had to do, would perhaps find even stronger terms of description.

Happily the child player must grow up, sooner or later, although in some cases it seems weary waiting. I was surprised to notice that in *Cavalcade* one of the English children grew up to have a strong American accent.

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As to the early days of the cinema, I have already mentioned Gaumont's "Bobby", and at the same period the Vitagraph Company had a favourite boy player with bobbed hair (following the Buster Brown fashion of that time). Children are now virtually excluded from British studios, but a former favourite in England was Peter Dear, and one of the prettiest girls was little Dulcie Parsons. I should be glad to hear how Dulcie is getting on.

America's choice included Jackie Coogan, Wesley Barry, Marie Osborne, Virginia Lee Corbin, Miriam Battista and "Baby Peggy" Montgomery (one of the most precocious of all). Mary Kornmann and Gertie Messinger used to play in the "Our Gang" series of children's comedies, and can still be seen, pretty girls of about nineteen or so, in Hal Roach comedies with other children rather older than in "Gang" days. Maurice Costello's daughters played child parts twenty years ago.

Lucille Ricksen died at the age of about sixteen, but little Madge Evans, whom we used to see in the coloured Prizma subjects, has grown into a graceful and pleasing heroine.

Shirley Temple, greatest of all children in the screen's history, needs no introduction from me.

Famous Beauties.

Screen beauties range from El'nor Fair to Belle Bennett, from Arline Pretty to Louise Lovely. There has never been any dearth of prettiness to offer in sacrifice before the camera, although at the moment the standard of available beauty is seemingly far less high than was the case ten years ago.

In answer to the previously-quoted enquiry "Are they as pretty in real life?", we cannot do better than retort "Of course not; but their real-life appearance is no concern of ours, and has no bearing on the matter." The duty of

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the camera is to assemble concepts of material so that they form thought-impressions. No one in his senses would want a cinema film to be a news reel of the private life of an actress. The actress (of whom we require to know neither the name nor the appearance in real life) is used for convenience to record impressions of femininity. The girl's face (pretty or otherwise) is basic material upon which is literally painted, with a brush, the delineation that will enable the camera to represent the imaginary character in the story.

The protest "She is made-up beyond recognition", which I have often heard, shews complete ignorance of the principle: the thing simply doesn't arise at all. Why on earth should we "recognise", in the heroine of one story, the same girl who was heroine in quite another?

Beauty, therefore, rests with the cameraman; and when it is required by the script, he has signally failed in his duty if he does not represent it in greater measure than can be naturally possessed by any human girl. So failed the early photographers who never did justice to the fair prettiness of Miss Kathlyn Williams. The late Clarine Seymour was a very pretty girl, but we would hardly expect to find in "Flameheart"* her unearthly beauty as *The Idol Dancer*, which was about the zenith of feminine loveliness on the screen. It may be remembered that Mr. Griffith proposed that she should be again an ordinarily good-looking girl in *'way Down East*, but fate disposed otherwise.

However, not all directors are like Griffith; not all cameramen like Billy Bitzer, and in the past a beautiful image has necessarily required a beautiful girl model. Apart from occasional moods of Clarine Seymour and Nazimova, the most consistently and yet variedly lovely girls have been Betty Compson and Corinne Griffith, whom many photographers have revelled in portraying in a dozen different incarnations.

* *Scarlet Days* (Griffith, 1918).

NOTABLE BEAUTIES



CORINNE GRIFFITH.



BETTY COMPSON.

NOTABLE BEAUTIES



CONSTANCE WORTH.



NORMA TALMADGE.

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Bathing Girls.

The bathing-girl films are an entirely American institution, and seem to have been created by Mack Sennett. Just as the Germans once made a cowboy film, there have been desultory attempts at turning out bathing comedies in Europe (which ought not to be impossible), but I have never seen any rivals to Sennett, Christie, Century and other American versions of these light-hearted, fast-action pieces of in consequence.

Some comedies have had a slightly mischievous flavour, but the bathing pictures are particularly innocent. Indeed, Mack Sennett prescribed, amongst the qualifications for candidates, that the girls must possess not merely a neat figure but a beautiful soul. Stout hearts, also, are covered—or nearly so—by those workmanlike fur-trimmed costumes, and the following account of a grim incident will convey some idea of the dangers incurred by these plucky girls.

A bathing comedy was being made near Redondo, on a brilliantly sunny afternoon. Everyone was in the gayest spirits, and although a somewhat high sea was running, it would certainly never have occurred to a soul that swift disaster was shortly to throw its cloud over the party that had set out so cheerfully.

A witness who gave tearful evidence at the subsequent enquiry deposes as follows:—

“It was a horrible thing, and even now we can hardly realise that it has happened. You couldn’t have a sweeter or more popular girl than Dessica. I have been in these comedies for three years now, and there has never been the slightest mishap, because every care is taken of us, and the Assistant Director marks out a safety line on the beach, and we are forbidden to cross it, and I allow Dessica must have done so, and I saw she was standing on a little mound of pebbles, and I guess she must have fallen off.”

I suppose the exact facts will never be known, but the upshot seems to be that the girl’s foot slipped, just as a

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huge wave was breaking. Shrieks rang out from the group of horrified spectators, but before assistance could be given, the unfortunate victim was soaked to the skin.

Some of the most famous of the bathing girls were Marie Prévost and Phyllis O'Haver (both of British extraction), Harriett Hammond, Mildred June, Vera Reynolds, Florence Gilbert and Helen Darling.

Their race has now been superseded by "wave" dancing girls, compared with whom the Mack Sennett ones were arctically clad.

Serial Favourites.

The first serial heroines were Kathlyn Williams (Selig) and Mary Fuller (Edison), but needless to say the most famous and popular was Pearl White, who had for villains Warner Oland and Sheldon Lewis; for hero, Creighton Hale or Arnold Daly.

Other popular favourites were Ruth Roland; Ben Wilson and Neva Gerber; George B. Seitz and Marguerite Courtot; William Duncan and Edith Johnson; George Hutchinson and Eileen Sedgwick; Jean Page and (villain) Joe Ryan.

Miss Texas Guinan, latterly famous for her Whoopee Girls, was a hard-riding heroine in Western serials, in which variety Eddie Polo also was popular. Railway stories were the speciality of Helen Holmes, and strange jungle adventures formed the staple occupation of Louise Lorraine, Juanita Hansen and Elmo Lincoln. Mrs. Vernon Castle, the famous dancer, had a considerable following as the heroine of an aviation serial, entitled *Patria*.

There are no serial favourites in England, but this kind of film was formerly produced in France, with René Cresté and Yvette Andréyor; Sandra Milowanoff, Mlle. Rollette, Blanche Montel, Edouard Mathé and Albert Mayer, and with Biscot as comedian.

Despite the charges of faking and "doubles", work in serials is often so strenuous as to necessitate a complete

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change and rest for recuperating. Thus, after the strain of eighteen episodes of *The Flaming Disk*, Elmo Lincoln gratefully basked in the calm of a holiday, lion-hunting in the Sierra Nevada.

Cowboys.

The "Royal North-West", we gather from films, hear the clear call "Get your man!", and cowboys apparently have a similar task, coupled with the equally important one of getting their girl.

In real life, herd-tenders and ranch hands, generically known as cowboys, are largely engaged in tedious duties connected with the raising of steers for beef. Alternatively, in certain districts of Arizona, Colorado and Nevada—and even in Texas—they may be occupied with flocks of sheep. I am afraid it must be recorded that the denizens of "Woolly" West country are not on very friendly terms with their fellows in Cow territory, and moreover that, just as the cowboy's employment is somewhat less exciting than would appear from the films, so is his spare-time recreation less romantic, the actual ranch land being seldom thickly populated with attractive girls. Where wool and beef tracts adjoin, other hobbies doubtless suggest themselves.

Such being the case, it is all the more creditable that a number of authentic cowboys, engaged for their remarkable riding, should become popular idols through their rendering of the more heroic rôles required by the movies.

In such pictures as *Broncho Billy's Round-Up*, G. M. Anderson appeared quite satisfactorily in the close-up views, but would often employ an expert rider to "double" for the long shots of thrilling pursuits. William Shakespeare Hart, a veteran stage actor, was an excellent rider, with a thorough knowledge of the West, but deemed it permissible to leave to a much younger man the dangerous feats such as falls from express trains. Otherwise he was thoroughly competent and convincing in Western rôles,

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as were Harry Carey, my own favourite, and the Farnum brothers—William, Dustin and Franklyn.

Tom Mix, Buck Jones, Hoot Gibson and Jack Hoxie are genuine cowboys, whose wild west accomplishments leave nothing to be desired.

Some Notable Performances.

One has only to attend a performance at some theatre celebrated for fine acting . . .

Let us go, for instance, to the Comédie Française. Let us studiously watch the extraordinary perfection of walk and gesture displayed by even a supernumerary player who brings in a telegram on a salver. Let us note carefully, in marvelling admiration, the effortless way in which the audience are kept spellbound, almost breathless for three minutes, by a single player who in complete silence writes a letter at a table.*

If I may repeat myself—before pronouncing on the average screen offering, let us compare values elsewhere. We shall then realise why, in the dispassionate account of the cinematograph in “Chambers’s Encyclopædia”, the film’s artistic value is tersely stated to be decidedly not high, as yet.

The reader will perhaps confront me with a previous remark that I do not look for individual acting in the cinema. Quite so—but that is what the spectator is obliged to watch, will-he-nill-he, and he must be excused if, in surveying the last twenty years, he finds just a few verdant spots upon which the memory may pleasantly dwell:

Werner Krauss and Lil Dagover in *Cabinett des Dr. Caligari*.

Pola Negri in *Gipsy Blood* and *A Forbidden Paradise*.

Rudolf Klein-Rogge in *Dr. Mabuse*.

Emil Jannings in *The Last Laugh*.

Fröken Greta Gustafsson in *The Atonement of Gosta Berling* (perhaps even in *The Joyless Street*).

* These examples kindly suggested by M. Eugène Durand.

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Mme. Falconetti in *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*.

Nadia Sibirskaia in *Ménilmontant*.

Réjane in *Madame Sans-Gêne*.

Matheson Lang in *Carnival*.

Miss Mae Marsh in Trial Scene, *Intolerance*.

Nazimova in *Revelation*.

Miss Louise Dresser in *The Goose Woman*.

Miss Za-Su Pitts in *Greed*.

Miss Belle Bennett in *Stella Dallas*.

Miss Elsie Ferguson in *Outcast*.

George Arliss in *The Devil*.

Guy Bates Post in *The Masquerader*.

Erich von Stroheim in *Foolish Wives*.

John Barrymore in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Lionel Barrymore in *The Copperhead*.

J. J. Dowling in *The Miracle Man*.

More recent performances which almost reconcile one to talking pictures:—

Films of Greta Garbo.

Miss Louise Hampton in *Nine till Six*.

Films of George Arliss.

Short scene with Miss Joan Crawford and Wallace

Beery in *Grand Hôtel*.

Miss Katharine Hepburn in *Morning Glory*.

Miss Jean Harlow in *Dinner at Eight*.

Henry Oscar in *The Case of Gabriel Perry*.

Obituary.

Both Edison and Friese-Greene have passed away, and the screen has lost the services of the undermentioned:—

Directors.—F. W. Murnau; Lupu Pick; Louis Mercanton; Jean Vigo; Mauritz Stiller; Thomas Ince; George Loane Tucker; William Desmond Taylor; George W. Hill; Léonce Perret; Thos. Buckingham; Paul Bern.

Leading Ladies.—Bernhardt; Réjane; Clarine Seymour; Olive Thomas; Lya de Putti; Florence la Badie;

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Ellen Terry; Norma Philips; Mabel Normand; Jeanne Eagels; Lillian Hall-Davis; Meggie Albanesi.

Leading Men.—Arthur Johnson; Jack Pickford; Aurele Sydney; Wallace Reid; Rodolpho Valentino; Milton Sills; Séverin-Mars; Harold Lockwood; Robert Harron; True Boardman; René Cresté; Robert Ames; Sir Gerald du Maurier; Lou Tellegen; Dennis Neilson-Terry; John Gilbert.

Ingénues and other Girl Players.—Martha Mansfield; Lucille Ricksen; Barbara La Marr; Marguerite de la Motte; Beatrice Dominguez; Alma Rubens; Lilyan Tashman; Thelma Todd.

Character Players and Comedians.—Connie Ediss; Marie Dressler and Mary Brough.

Rudolf Christians; Theodore Roberts; Lon Chaney; David Torrence; Judd Green; Gordon Westcott; Louis Wolheim; Sam Hardy; Alec B. Francis; Fred Kerr; Lowell Sherman; Lew Cody and Lennox Pawle.

John Bunny; Max Linder; Larry Semon; Roscoe Arbuckle; George Grossmith and Will Rogers.

Several of these artists died from the virulent influenza outbreak of 1922, and one from injuries received at a party. Three committed suicide in Europe and three in California. Martha Mansfield, the beautiful leading girl in *Dr. Jekyll*, was burned to death in a circus tent, and Bobby Harron died from the accidental discharge of a revolver in his suit-case. Elizabeth McKentry, Ormer Locklear and others succumbed to injuries received whilst filming.

William Desmond Taylor, although a notable Hollywood director, was an Englishman formerly known as William Dean Tanner. He was murdered in puzzling circumstances, and neither the culprit nor the motive has ever been discovered to this day.

THE FILM.

1. *The Title.*

Anxious thought is very rightly given to the choice of film titles, and through the ingenuity and fertile invention which yearly become more apparent in this matter, it is comparatively seldom that we are obliged to fall back upon the shiftless old expedient of making the film bear the same name as the book on which it is based.

The title's first duty is perhaps to indicate roughly the category into which the picture falls. We do not expect deep philosophy in *Love, Honour and Oh! Baby*, and there is an implied warning that custard-pie lovers will be disappointed in *Thy Soul shall bear Witness*. Something a trifle highbrow, again, is conveyed by the intellectual dignity of *The Egg Crate Wallop*, *The Fall Guy*, *The Goofy Gob* and *Laughing Gravy*.

If, in furtherance of this useful policy, the title can be made to yield a clue to the plot, this is all to the good. Many a picturegoer who has remained somewhat mystified throughout the performance, and has subsequently ascertained the name of the film, has greatly appreciated the clear indication it affords. Some titles reveal everything in a flash—*Bladys of the Stewpony*; *Under the Tonto Rim*; *Moran of the Fru Letty*; *The Whiffenpoof*; *Yancoma Yil-lies*. "Romeo and Juliet" tells us practically nothing, whereas the proposed change of title to *Sex and Snags* will instantly give the information that the story deals with love under difficulties.

Apart from the necessity for actual translation (which will be considered on a later page), some phrases require altering for the British market, if the resulting title is to be as clear as the original was to Americans. (Nevertheless, the English had to take their chance with *Fair Co-Ed*,

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In Judgment of—, *West Point of the Air* and *The White Moll*). Conversely, just as the French people dislike difficult names, and re-christen the Roman Emperors Caille-gule, Néron, Jules César . . . pretentious and cacophonous European titles (of books or of films) are unwelcome in the States. Hence “At the Mercy of Tiberias”, “The Last Days of Pompeii”, “The Admirable Crichton”, “Eugénie Grandet” and “Carmen” became *The Price of Silence*, *The Crimson Flood*, *Male and Female*, and so forth.

Certain film titles, naturally enough, have been known to cause confusion, or even the embarrassment which might assail a shy girl asking a music-store clerk “Have you ‘A Kiss for Me’?” A film of Aurele Sydney was called *A Wife for a Week*, and an exhibitor who telegraphed to his renting agency or “exchange”, asking if he could have it, created quite a stir in a suburban post office. Another source of misapprehension is the tendency to give exactly the same name to two pictures, in no way connected, e.g. *Blackmail*; *Blood Money*, *Love, Life and Laughter*; *Married Life* and *Reunion*.

There is no copyright in titles, however, and the same thing frequently happens in literature—for instance, in the case of the two quite dissimilar stories named “Carnival”. Considering this, and the fact that in any case the original title is often discarded when a book is filmed, it seems curious that thousands of pounds should be paid to secure the rights of a best-seller, chiefly on account of the drawing power of its title. It is difficult, also, to understand why a condition should have been imposed, making it necessary for “Sealed Orders” to be filmed as *Orders Under Seal*, and what was gained by re-titling “John Chilcote, M.P.” and the famous comedies “Fanny and the Servant Problem” and “Eliza Comes to Stay” as *The Masquerader*, *Strictly Confidential* and *Dangerous to Men*.*

* Apparently we are free to filch an author's title, for an entirely different story, but must have special permission to use it for the original one!

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From so short a form as *He, She, F.P.I., M.*, titles may extend to nine words in length, but two or three words are often the most effective, e.g., *Fate's Plaything*.

One of the best and most charming, in my opinion, was *Love's Lariat*. Here we have a word which, despite the Spanish origin of *reata* (as of *bolas* and *lazo*), cannot but be considered English and easily understood. At the same time it has just a slight technical flavour of the ranch, and no more apt designation could possibly be devised for the delightful Western story with Harry Carey and Olive Fuller Golden.

2. *The Sub-Title.*

In the far-off days of silent films (and to a certain extent this still applies to-day) the message presented by the moving image was reinforced by — shall we say? — literary matter contained in what are familiar to us collectively as “sub-titles.” The main title, it will be remembered, was supplemented at suitable divisions in the story by *sub-titles*, properly so described, indicating different chapters or changes of scene; but the expression also covered introductory captions, explanatory matter and the rendering of the “lines” spoken by players. The “caption” consists of witty or helpful observations, or statements describing the various players or material factors as they appear. This term has been criticised as being incorrect, but in America it is quite admissible as a derivation from legal usage.

In Talking Films, of course, we are not so familiar with the occasionally fatuous and frequently lengthy sub-title, and the once inevitable “Later that night” has given way to the equally nauseating repetition of “Won’t you please be seated?” No longer is the hostess shewn as saying “I’ll have the hired girl get tea.” A steady gain in artificiality and pose has brought about the negro servant’s replacement by a French maid, who is now invariably called “M’ree.”

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I think we shall find it interesting, though, to recall the general nature of those components of silent films, especially as many of them were decidedly effective. From an arid desert of mediocrity, a dull plain of "Later's" and "Came the Dawns" we have frequently been rescued by flashes of artistry, initiative and common-sense. In Mr. Griffith's film, "The Idol Dancer," the heroine is ushered by the charming caption:

"Mary, the Girl . . . Through her veins coursed the mingled blood of vivacious France, languorous Samoa and inscrutable Java." (See p. 78).

In an admittedly flippant film of Miss Constance Talmadge, instead of the tediously commonplace, we were enabled to appreciate such sub-titles as:

"Then came the Night,
Fair, eldest child of Love,

The wondrous Night!" (1)

and other Griffith pictures contained many pleasing and aptly-expressed references to the unfolding of the story—captions which we admire, not because of any intrinsic merit as isolated pieces of poetry, but because they blend so well with the picture, to convey an artistic message.

"Anna, but we might have called her Woman, for is not hers the story . . ." (2)

* * *

As will be seen later, it is possible, although not altogether desirable, entirely to dispense with sub-titles in a silent film, and many have suffered from a superfluity of them, which is destructive to the action and boring in general. Typical instances of this fault may be found in picturizations of stage farces, such as "Nothing but the Truth." As demonstrating the difficulty of improving upon the carefully-balanced blend of image and printed word, it may be mentioned that captions are included in some of the latest dialogue films.

(1) *The Love Expert* (First National).

(2) *'Way Down East*.

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Sub-titles are useless unless they convey a definite meaning, and defective unless they convey it instantaneously. Each country has its own way of expressing things. The English say "A burnt child dreads the fire," but the brilliant French paraphrase "*Chat echaudé craint l'eau froide*", surely goes one better with its reference to *cold* water. In only too many cases, the wording of films has suggested the cheapest journalese rather than educated current usage, although it is only fair to add that newspapers are not guilty of mis-spelling. Thousands of times we have seen the possessive "its" spelt in films with an apostrophe, and sub-titling in general has often been vile in every way. Atrocious sloppiness was shewn in this respect by the films of one concern, whose leading spirit was stated to be a motor-coach proprietor. He apparently filmed Ethel M Dell and other stories as a spare-time aside, and I well remember imploring the firm—but without result—to let some educated person see the painted cards before their fatuous observations were recorded by the little titling-camera.

A cinema-goer cannot be expected to tolerate foreign sub-titles, but first let us endeavour to determine what "another language" actually implies. Referring to the wording in the films of his country (the U.S.A.), Mr. Elmer L. Rice observes ⁽¹⁾ that, being vaguely based upon English, it should be easily intelligible to Americans. The producers of these films have usually carried this assumption a step farther, by forwarding untranslated American positives for British showing, perhaps bearing in mind the Port Said shoe-black whose sign announced "English spoken, American understood."

After all, as *Punch* cheerily pointed out, long ago, if the language of these titles isn't exactly English at the time, "it soon will be," and the result of expert schooling in the past is that no English filmgoer would nowadays turn a

(1) "*Pur*," p. 81.

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hair at:

"Si Spoopleflap, a boob, who is bulling on a fifty-fifty cinch, but falls to a jitney hunch from a side-hitting gink." Nevertheless, although accustomed from years of contact with the States, the present writer was quite unable to assimilate some of the epigrams in "Slow as Lightning," a film shewing Richard Talmadge struggling with Wall Street Barons.

"Though I room with her, she don't phase me any," a college girl remarked to me recently, and this curious American practice of making verbs out of substantives and adjectives, as in "Wise me up on this," is illustrated in many a sub-title and spoken line. I feel, or "sense", as they would say, an undefinable suggestion of America in the newspaper headline:

LOVE-MAD STENO ORDERED HELD IN WEST-SIDE DEB'S KILLING

and, as mentioned above, the journalistic style seems to influence the language in films, which frequently loses clarity by imitating the excessive economy of the contents bill.

"Her name for mine that gave gold for ring," was puzzling to readers the other day,* and some years ago, on encountering a placard announcing "£1,000,000 Will Suit," I murmured to myself, "I should think it will!"

So cryptic was the headline:

OYSTER BARS JAM PROBE

that readers of an English magazine were invited, but in vain, to give a satisfactory solution of it. All they could answer was that it seemed vaguely to treat of Prohibition. In case the explanation may be of interest, it is given further on.

Finally, the appended examples shew how two sub-titles, even though in correct English, were unintelligible to British movie audiences.

* *Daily Mirror*, November, 1934.

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"They dove in black; they came out white." (1) and "These letters don't gibe," (2) owed their locally recondite quality to the use of a past tense of "dive" and a particular meaning of "gibe" which are now practically obsolete except in America.

3. *Titling for Export.*

In order that films might be available to a world-wide audience (if "audience" is the right word), the titles were translated into 36 languages. It was even possible to obtain copies shewing three languages at a time.

There seems little call for comment on this, except to mention that in the early days the attention paid to the quality of the translation was exceedingly casual. We have only to look at many provincial concert programmes to-day to realise what perpetrations are still committed in dealing with words in another tongue.

"Norwegian Bridle Procession by David Greig" (who might more readily be supposed the author of Danish bacon) and the "Sextant from 'Lucifer'" occur to me out of hundreds of these howlers I have witnessed. Very well, then: so it was with the films of about 1910. Even if the rendering was not definitely incorrect, it utterly failed to convey the atmosphere of the original, although happily that was not always a great loss. In translating *Ich höre den ewigen Gesang* (3) the schoolboy, one feels, indifferently captured the true spirit of Goethe when he tendered "Each hour the earwig's singing." Equally unfortunate were the attempts at an English titling of innumerable French and Italian films, and I imagine the British and American companies were just as much lacking. "The Rent Shadow" struck me as being a poor and ambiguous rendering of a French title, and at first I supposed it dealt

(1) Century Comedies.

(2) Lubin Manufacturing Co.

(3) "I hear the eternal Song," with apologies for showing off

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with the classic standby of the poor farmer who is threatened with eviction from the family homestead by a cruel landlord.

Out of the hundreds of makeshift title translations, however, I fancy it would be difficult to beat this line from a French picture of ancient history:

"Annibal's the Army wiped¹ a strong loss."

4. *Humorous Sub-Titles.*

Humorous sub-titles, of which innumerable examples will come to mind, may be divided into witty comments on things treated in the film, whether or not the subject matter itself is funny, and the mere description of laughable incidents, including the reproduced speeches on which the amusing quality of the picture is based. A silent film whose humour is founded on speech sub-titles, or whose funny incidents have to be explained, is, of course, the poor sort of thing we have seen only too often. Witty speeches belong to the stage, especially if they contain in themselves the sum total of the fun available; and so the bright-commentary sort of caption is greatly superior, for it merely embellishes film comedy proper.

First of all we have the "smart crack" which simply introduces a character, e.g.,

"Ezra Dank—so crooked he could lie on a corkscrew."²

This personal commentary is rather a speciality of the United States, and it will be remembered that Billy Sunday's sermons contained epigrams such as "He's sunk so low he'd want an airplane to get to Hell." Specimens include "The football coach. So tough he shaved with a blow-lamp,"³ "The Head Shopwalker. Muscle-bound

¹ I can only imagine the last four words were. "essuya une forte perte," translated with deadly literalness.

² Christie Comedies.

³ "College Days" (Hal Roach).

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with patting himself on the back,"¹ "Plugg and Ugg—two hard-boiled yeggs."²

In one film a character was described as "a reformed clergyman," but this quip would probably not be allowed by the present-day Hays censorship.

Here is a nasty one, inspired by the Tea Pot Dome oil scandal, followed by a skit on American education:—

"Her father was a rich senator, but they caught him."
"The University—a large playing field with a college attached."³

More elaborate sub-titles threw in a crack or two as make-weight, in addition to performing the required introduction:

"The twins—crazy to learn the Rumba. (You don't have to be, but it helps a lot)."

Then, of course, there are the captions which occur at intervals throughout a humorous film, quite apart from the entrance of a character. Hundreds of these, however, have been merely repetitions of stale jokes, and I will not further afflict the reader with such quotations; nor can I recollect any good examples from other than American films, and my survey purports to be international.

Well-known advertising slogans are reflected in many a sub-title of the old days, and in a Harold Lloyd comedy the girl's unwelcome kid brother received the tribute:—

"The skin you love to touch—with a strap."

An almost record collection of sallies was contained in the excellent Fox comedy, "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court." At this time a book by Ibañez, "Los Cuadro Jinetes del Apocalipsis", was the rage of two continents, and Harry Myers, playing the hero of Mark Twain's aforementioned classic, on seeing a quartet of mounted warriors clattering by, calls out:—

"Ah! The Four Horsemen of the Eucalyptus!"

¹ "Safety Last"; ² "College Days" (Hal Roach).

³ Mack Sennett. "Yeggs" is approximately the equivalent of "roughs."

One of my favourite humorous captions was:—

“Her Husband—but he was more like a Friend.”⁽¹⁾
and a colleague representing a London evening paper chooses the following final example, undoubtedly very witty, and almost too subtle:—“He was a well-known Secret Service Agent.”⁽²⁾

5. *The Continuity.*

The various separate scenes having been photographed, there would remain the necessity for piecing them together, and editing them to form a continuity (the shots by themselves being of comparatively little consequence). Associated ideas will be linked together in the continuity, and contrasted ones will be separated; suddenness and smoothness, continuance and cessation, the triflingly ephemeral and the enduringly deep—all will be respected in tempo, cutting and spacing. I cannot give technical details here, but the subject will be revived in the final chapter.

The cleverly-constructed negative, telling the story wholly in terms of the screen, and based not so much upon the separate photo strips as upon the way in which they are combined (since exactly the same strips can be made to tell utterly different stories), will never have to rely upon words. At the same time, although sub-titles should not strictly be necessary, they have in practice been found desirable, and only one film masterpiece⁽³⁾ has ever dispensed with them.

The fact that a photoplay could consist of about 90 per cent. sub-titles has been known since the earliest days—long before the recent valuable discovery that it could be composed of incessant raucous chatter. That the unaided image could suffice, on the other hand, was demonstrated

(1) P. Christie Comedies.

(2) Mack Sennett.

(3) Murnau's "The Last Laugh".

TYPES: Comédienne, Juvenile



Za-Su Pitts.



Nova Pilbeam.

TYPES OF PLAYERS

Crafty or Oriental Type.



HELEN CHANDLER.

PL. XIV.



GIBB McLAUGHLIN.

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in the 7,000-foot subject *Lily of the Alley*,¹ directed by Henry Edwards, and in 1921 Hugo Ballin made *The Journey's End*, with a similar absence of sub-titles.

Amongst the advantages of sub-titles, we may mention—An agreeable change; an occasional short cut in explanations; clear indications as to the passage of time. The caption, for instance, very efficiently distinguishes between simultaneity and sequence, which otherwise are liable to be confused; and a very few words, such as "Next day in Paris", "Meanwhile in Vienna . . ." will be quite adequate. In modern talkies, we are frequently uncertain as to whether events are simultaneous or not, and in fact it is generally necessary to have another good look at the programme when we get home, to see if anything can be cleared up by the official explanation.

Disadvantages include the slight distraction caused by the break in the story, and the fact that a lengthy sub-title may be necessary, even to represent a brief thought. Of course it follows that the longer the sub-title, the greater must be the break in the continuity, for at least a foot of film must be allowed for every line of reading.

In a commendable effort to reduce this break, certain comedies used to have captions printed on an illustrated background, perhaps of amusing cartoons stressing the point made by the film just previously. But a sudden cessation of movement is an interruption, at best, and a great improvement was introduced in the underwater story, *Girl of the Sea*.² Here the sub-titles had an actually living background of scores of fishes in continual movement.

Something of the sort was seen in *Cavalcade* (Fox, 1932), although in that instance the animated titles had the difficult task of continuing the realism of battlefield scenes which were themselves far from convincing.

¹ Hepworth, 1923.

² Republic, 1921

6. *National Humour and its Reflection in Films.*

Now that we have surveyed some of the conditions under which the movies are made (although the actual operation of making them is hardly within the scope of these reminiscences), it will be as well to see if we can gather pleasant memories from the completed film.

We can hardly select, for a start, a more appropriate aspect than humour, which is world-wide, and seen in all films except those of Scandinavia. The Italian language is devised for love, we are told; English for prayer, French for satire and German for upbraiding; but the film should be universal, and humour, subject to slightly varying national characteristics, is practically universal too, a very valuable ingredient of cinema entertainment.

It is indeed a gloomy picture that has no touch of fun, and although there has been adverse criticism of the introduction of buffoonery into a serious film, it seems useless to cavil at an institution going back thousands of years. Even the ancient Indian fairy romances, such as *Sakuntala*, almost invariably included a comic character who appeared intermittently to liven things up.

Film comedy is a speciality in which the Americans have always excelled, but, except as to humorous sub-titles, they have not had a monopoly, and we can remember equally having derived amusement from the incredible vulgarity of Mary Brough and Gordon Harker, the delightful drolleries of Biscot, the fatuous smile of Henry Edwards and the absurd earnestness of Edmund Gwenn.

A short selection of film incidents or familiar jokes will serve to remind us of some of the characteristics peculiar to the cinema humour of different nations.

U.S.A.—Heavy cynicism (as distinct from the light gibes that leave no sting):—

“ Her father was a rich senator . . . ” (already quoted).

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Scene in a Court of Justice:

Spectator: "Look, they're bringing him in now, and I must say I agree with those who maintain you can tell the criminal anywhere. If ever a face shewed lust, falsehood, utter dishonesty—"

Horrified Friend: "Shut up, you fool! That's the judge!!" (Judges of the United States wear plain clothes).

France.—Light but deadly satire on human foibles.

Perfidy—

Lui: "C'est curieux comme tes formes sont meilleures que celles de ma femme."

Elle: "Ton ami Henri me le faisait remarquer hier soir."

Insincerity—

"Est-il à vous, Madame, ce délicieux petit toutou?"

"Non, monsieur."

"Veux-tu te sauver, sale bête!"

Neatly skipping over the first joke, we may offer the following as a rough version of the second:

"I presume this ripping little doggie can only belong to some one as charming as yourself, Madam?"

"Not guilty, sir."

"Take that, and get out, you mangy tyke!"

Parisian contempt for provincialism.

"T'as beau parler: ça fera du bruit à Landerneau!"

(The spirit of this is untranslatable. As a bare rendering of the words:—"I must warn you that this is liable to receive unfavourable comment in official circles in Scunthorpe (or Twin Forks)".)

Good examples are seen in *Le Chapeau de Paille d'Italie* (Albatross, 1925) and *Un Soir de Rafle* (Tobis, 1932), both directed by René Clair.

England.—General humour, subtly conveyed.

“ Ah! Ikey, I vos sorry to hear about der fire at your place last Saturday.”

“ Ssh! *Next* Saturday!! ”

A very fat woman arrives with her child at a booking office of the London Underground:

“ One and a half for the Elephant, please.”

Clerk: “ That seems reasonable, but what about the little boy? ”

* * *

The late Barclay Gammon's humour was conveyed in a torrent of words so rapid that Alfred Pitman was unable to take them down in shorthand. The old-time Christy Minstrels, on the contrary, had a comedian who kept the audience convulsed with laughter, merely by slowly flapping his enormous boots.

I have already advanced the view that verbosity, either audible or in print, is not particularly appropriate to the film, but there seems no reason why talkies should not be good comedy entertainment, although they can hardly hope to do more than imitate the stage. Silent films with regulated sub-titles, on the other hand, can in certain circumstances develop a greater climax of hilarity than the stage, because in the theatre a point is reached when the audience are laughing so much that it is impossible for them to listen to further dialogue. In “ A Bit of a Test ” one of the laughs persists for two minutes.

The talking film has no means of telling when the audience have stopped laughing, and thus during Miss Cicely Courtneidge's singing in *Aunt Sally* (Gaumont British, 1934) we could see a dog starting to howl, but it was impossible to hear the facetious remarks of some workmen in the rafters.

For an imaginary example of the equivalent use of a sub-title, let us suppose the audience to be laughing at one

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of those knockabout situations in "slapstick" comedy. Mr. Benjamin Hampton has very appositely said*: "Physical embarrassment and the downfall of dignity had been the basic items for hundreds of years," and it must be admitted that in all countries amusement has ever been aroused at the misfortunes of others. The downfall of dignity is here obtained by the aid of a very formidable and starchy dowager, incapable of smiling at any of the comedian's follies. A comic anarchist's bomb explodes near her, and the clothes are blown off her back.

As the smoke clears away, the lorgnetted dowager slowly turns round, suspecting an attempt at familiarity, and a sub-title shews her as exclaiming icily "I don't follow!" If the audience have laughed before, they will yell at this absurd incongruity.

In the delightful *double entendre* created by Miss Dodo Watts and the instructress in *My Wife's Family* (British International, 1932. Monty Banks), the words are of suspicious importance, clearly suggesting that the film is little more than an illustration to them. In the undermentioned examples, by contrast, the humour is definitely contained in the absurd image, although in (a) a sub-title and in (b) a spoken line are necessary. For this reason a mere description may fail to convince readers of how laughable the situations were.

(a) A masterly impression of coarse ill-breeding is given by an enormous Russian sailor (Kalla Pasha) who has seized Miss Phyllis O'Haver for his sweetie. With his huge left paw he grips her: in his right he holds high an upturned flagon of stout, the stream being accurately directed to fall down his gullet, with a noise like the bath running out. He remarks complacently that they will make a swell society pair—"You got de looks; I got de class!" (Mack Sennett, 1920).

(b) In David Belasco's *Bachelor Father* (Cosmopolitan, 1932. Robt. Z. Leonard), Miss Marion Davies drives her

* H.M. 37.

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new car into a tree, causing a tangled wreck which in real life could be obtained only by hours of careful smashing. Her guardian rushes out, aghast at the smoking chaos, but the girl, in mild surprise, protests that he "can surely make allowance for fair wear and tear!"

(c) In this example, we must award fifty-fifty between words and image. Harry Myers, as the "drunk" in *Important Witness* (Warner, 1933), wanders into a berth where a fellow-traveller is working out a jig-saw puzzle (the latest craze in the States).

"T'ck! T'ck!" he says, sympathetically. "How did you come to break it?"

(d) Only a preliminary piece of dialogue is required:—The two gilded youths have ordered whisky, and the club waiter asks if they want "double" whiskies. They slowly turn their heads to bestow an astonished stare which sends him hurriedly on his errand. (*Rodney Steps In—Realart*, 1933).

Pure Film Humour, independent of words.

(a) Short scene from *Married Life* (Paramount Mack Sennett, 1920).

Two worthy patients (probably Ben Turpin and Ford Sterling) are seen leaving the alcoholism ward of a big hospital, on discharge as cured. In an adjacent surgery, gas is being administered to another patient. An urgent message calls the anæsthetist away so hurriedly that, with charming film inconsequence, he is obliged to leave the patient to his devices. The swelling body, starting to rise, breaks its moorings, floats up to the ceiling and is presently wafted through the open door into the passage. This apparition is somewhat dismaying to Ben and Ford: however, they bravely realise that Rome was not built in a day, and with quiet dignity return to continue their treatment.

(b) The gay old sport (Guy Kibbee) has given his friend a present of a little Pekinese dog, which she says will always remind her of him. Intrigued as to the exact mean-

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ing of this statement, Guy holds the dog's face beside his own in front of the mirror and makes a few simple experiments. (*Gold Diggers of 1933*—Warner).

(c) As an amiable lunatic, Henry Edwards sees at last a clear chance of escape from the private asylum. Near the back gate of the grounds, which the gardener has very carelessly left open and unguarded, a long ladder is discovered. The lunatic, with a satisfied smile, scales the high wall by its means and, pulling it up after him, similarly descends on the other side. It then remains only to bring the ladder back through the open gate, and replace it exactly as it was left. (*The Lunatic at Large*—Hepworth, 1921).

(d) *More Subtle*. The young circus girl goes up to a total stranger and smacks his face hard, apparently for no other reason than that he was looking at her. She then returns to her tent, which is placarded "Thought Reader." —(*Give her a Ring*. B.I.P., 1934).

The Humour of Max Linder.

(It is a difficult task to describe Max Linder to readers who have not been fortunate enough to see him, and they will reasonably complain that there does not seem to be much sense in the films selected as his vehicle. And yet I have never seen anything funnier than the absurd incidents of the statue and the umbrella).

(a) *Bal chez la Comtesse* (Pathé, 1910).

The impecunious Max and his companion would love to accept the invitation to the Countess's smart ball, always notable for crowds of pretty girls, but some unknown burglars (or more probably spiteful rivals) have stolen all boots, shoes and other footwear from their flat, maliciously leaving in exchange two pairs of dreadful tramp's beetle-crushers.

Clod-hoppered and all, Max wedges in at a reception given on the previous night, and graced by the presence of

the Duchess Brighteyes, undisputed leader of fashion. Crouching down behind the Duchess's chair, he arranges for his as-now-very-much-worn *chaussures* to peer coyly out beyond the hem of her lovely dress.

Smart Parisian bootmakers are kept busy during the next twenty-four hours, but very few guests at the ball have "hit off" the new fashion quite so convincingly as the much-envied Max and Charles.

(b) *Le Gendre* (Pathé, 1910).

Max has no real wish to be disagreeable, but he is definitely not keen on the girl, who has the kind of voice that Mr. P. G. Wodehouse has likened to a squadron of cavalry clattering over a tin bridge. Urged on by her persistent parents, he constrains himself to sit near her as she sings at the piano.

When it gets too bad, he puts up the umbrella he has providently brought.

Next morning the parent takes his half-hearted guest to shoot pigeons from the terrace. Max must be decidedly off-colour, for his first shot smashes a valuable statue situated directly behind them.

Slapstick.

Humour of the "slapstick" variety, for which Mr. Ben B. Hampton has traced so honourable a lineage, is seen at its best when carried out with fine timing, and if possible some little degree of inspiration. In the early films it consisted largely of custard pies, dynamite and comic policemen mounted on crazy products of that famous "flivver" manufacturer who is stated to have made walking a pleasure.

The roads, in those early comics, not only contained every possible kind of stall, barrow and other fragile obstruction, but were themselves so incessantly opened up for repairs as to suggest that the highway authorities would have been well advised to fit them with time-saving zipp

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fasteners. It was in those days fatal to get under a car or look down a hose-pipe, dangerous to use a swing-door and hopeless to attempt to catch the ascending lift. If the fire smoked, it was inadvisable to clear the chimney, as this caused so much draught that the furniture was sucked out of the room. On the other hand, although much apprehension was felt when the comedy hero was strapped to the railway-line, the fear was altogether groundless, as the train invariably swerved on to a hitherto unnoticed track at the left side of the picture.

Well! well! Much custard has flowed under the dishes since then, and the technique of knockabout comedy makes us realise how the old place has changed. The wheezy Fords are to-day replaced by the "Bantam" cars made by the American Austin Car Co., of Butler, Pa.; it is on the downward journey that we now miss catching the elevator; the modern train is switched to the right of the cross-points.*

THEN.

The comedy hero, hidden behind a screen, delivered the unseen blows at each of the police in turn, making them fight one the other.

Keystone, 1912.

Some casks, becoming unfastened from a dray, roll downhill, leaving destruction in their train.

The Runaway Barrels, 1911.

NOW.

The hero, hidden under the restaurant table, hits the shins of the two men in turn, making them quarrel.

The Kid from Spain, 1933.

Some beer barrels, becoming unfastened from a dray, roll downhill and cause quite a lot of fun.

What! No Beer?, 1932.

The Unexpected.

About equally effective are the apparently contrary styles of humour in which we know in advance and in which we do not anticipate the climax.

* *The Rainmakers* (Radio, 1935).

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A man appears, panting and exhausted, and deposits a very heavy trunk. During his absence, two other comedians replace the heavy trunk by an empty one. Our friend reappears, takes off his jacket, rolls up his sleeves, spits on his hands . . . We know well enough what is going to happen, but that does not prevent our chortling joyously in advance. .

A large and evidently very reliable touring car draws up, with solid travelling trunks strapped in position. The chauffeur helps Buster Keaton to settle down comfortably with rugs and magazines. The car sets off, and completes, without a hitch, its journey to the house opposite. (*The Navigator*, M.G.M.)

The suicide throws himself from the bridge into the boiling torrent below. The faithless stream, although not dry, has only eleven inches of water. (Lubin, 1911).*

We are permitted, through the bars, a view of the sad final scene—the grim police officers (doubtless injured to the proximity of death); the black-robed chaplain bestowing a last benediction; the heart-broken relatives; various ghouls of the Press (following the practice in the United States). A uniformed official opens the heavy iron gates: the train is in, and Harold Lloyd sets off for his new life in a big city. (*Safety Last*—Hal Roach, 1921).

Detachment.

Buster Keaton and the Indians. Dowager saying “I don’t follow” (already quoted).

Two police officers are twirling their truncheons and idly chatting near the lake in Central Park. “What are you doing this evening, Casey?” “I aim to go to the Police Ball.”

A despairing girl tiptoes furtively past them, and throws herself into the lake. Ill-bred curiosity being barred by tacit agreement, Flanagan wipes the spray from his sleeve,

* See Mr. Korda’s remark on p. v.

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and proceeds:—"And did you go to the Police Ball last year?"

(George Robey in "You'd be surprised". A grim and ruthless piece of humour which was not very well received).

Ludicrous Incongruity.

The girl is hurrying over breakfast, harassed by the unnerving fussiness of her parents, who fear she will be late for the office. In a whirl, she springs to her feet, a slice of coffee in one hand and a round of buttered sausage in the other, and they rush her into her coat and hat. "Good-byes" are shouted and the clamour is deafening. "Take care of yourself!" "Hurry, dear!" "Be careful: don't run into any accidents!" "Ring up when you get there safely!"

Thus she is solicitously trundled off, and true to her promise, on entering the office on the opposite side of the hallway, she quickly hangs up her clothes and telephones of her safe arrival. ? (a recent talking picture).

The dignified, formidable dowager has vainly rung for her butler. Rising, she goes to the door, like a stately vessel gliding gracefully into port. She opens it and calls "John!", and her voice is not loud but deep. Still there is no answer. Inserting two fingers in her mouth, she gives an ear-splitting cat-call. (Imaginary).

Absurdity.

Douglas Maclean asks to see some postage-stamps. The girl shews him a sheet of them, and after some deliberation he chooses one from the middle. (*Chickens*—Famous Lasky, 1921).

The cat, while at play, swallows the little girl's knitting-wool. Later: four kittens wearing jumpers.

The foreman blows the lunch-whistle, and the navy takes from his brazier a ridiculously elaborate French dish, ruffled and garnished as at a cookery exhibition. (Imaginary).

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On being asked what has become of his cousin, Ralph Lynn starts the search by opening a drawer. (*Turkey Time*—Gaumont British, 1933).

The door of a small square shed opens, and a twelve-wheeled char-à-bancs, sixty feet in length, drives out. (? Century or Mermaid comedies).

(b) *More subtile.*

The bedroom telephone rings, and the disturbed sleeper buries the *instrument* under his pillow. (*Going Hollywood*—Cosmopolitan, 1934).

A policeman trips over an Austin bantam, which he had not noticed at the side of the pavement.

The little car, pursued by bandits, takes refuge in the open end of a drainpipe. (*Mr. Lemon of Orange*—Fox, 1931. J. G. Blystone).

(c) *Very Subtle.*

The car emerges from the drain pipe, driving out forwards. (*Ibidem*).

Absurd and Crescendo Exaggeration.

Basic examples from fiction:—

(a) American:—You should see the way we hustle, over there. In the morning as you ride to work, you notice the architect surveying a suitable building plot. When you pass the spot again in the evening there is a roaring colony, with tenants being turned out for back rent.

A most amusing classic contains a description of an early form of convertible bed. At a touch of a handle it would change into a washstand, and then into a mangle, sofa or bookshelf. After the first stiffness had worn off, the various changes were made, if anything, too easily, and the unwary sleeper found that a slight movement caused his bed abruptly to turn into a bookshelf. The contrivance

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then had to be relegated to the cellar, but the mechanism had become so sensitive that the changes were apt to occur spontaneously, and the thing could often be heard practising through the night. ("Out of the Hurly-Burly"—Max Adeler).

(b) English:—A visitor reported that in some districts the housing shortage was so acute that four families would live in a single room. Warming to his work, he proceeded to remember a case where the families in the four corners found that the bare space in the middle had a lonely appearance. Another family was therefore recruited, and all five got to know one another quite well, and continued to live in perfect harmony—until the people in the middle started taking in lodgers.

(cf. the incident of the cheese, in Jerome K. Jerome's "Three Men in a Boat").

Successive stages of hyperbole are well illustrated in a little joke about Council houses:—

"Please, Father says can we hang a picture on the end of a nail you've driven through our wall?"

"Oh! then you are the little boy from next door?"

"Next door but one."

Early film embodiment of this idea:—

A rich young man, on the urgent instigation of some friends, is contemplating residence in a certain small village. For some reason that I cannot remember, a rival faction are equally keen on driving him away, and hatch a plot to convey the impression that the place is very unhealthy. An undertaker from "Gloomdale Cemetery", for instance, calls to take routine particulars as to measurements and the design of the headstone.

Outside, on the village green, a very different picture is on view. Old men with long white beards are playing childish and very energetic games, and disporting themselves on swings and see-saws. On being questioned by the mystified youth, a venerable greybeard admits that he

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cannot remember a death in the village, but suggests that his father should be consulted.

"Oh! And where is your father?"

"Over there, playing leapfrog with grandfather."
(Lubin—about 1910).

Humour tempered by graver emotions.

None other than the famed humorous writer, Thomas Hood, was responsible for both the "Song of the Shirt" and the sad poem gently beginning:

"Take her up tenderly;

Lift her with care:

Fashion'd so slenderly,

Young and so fair."

and as brutally ending:

"Rattle her bones

Over the stones:

Only a—

Nobody owns."

Jerome K. Jerome appears to have had a similar vein, as we find it recorded, amidst the very joyous adventures of the "Three Men in a Boat", that in a quiet backwater they came upon the body of a drowned girl, than which there can surely be no sadder element in human experience.

Loneliness and separation are the end themes in Chaplin's films, *The Kid* and *The Circus*, and more than a touch of bitterness is seen in *The Gold Rush* and *City Lights*, although each of these pictures is stated to be a masterpiece of humour. In *The Gold Rush*, for instance, the lonely man visiting a dance-hall sees a beautiful girl hastening towards him, eager for a dance. Alas! she goes straight past: her eye had been on someone behind him. To anyone with a first-hand experience of friendlessness, this incident will contain nothing humorous.

Typical of bitter French humour is de Maupassant's "The Diamond Necklace", filmed by the Ideal Company with Miss Jessie Winter as the wife of a poor Government

official. Invited to a state reception given by her husband's department, she borrows a diamond necklace from a wealthy friend of her schooldays. The necklace is lost or stolen, and has to be replaced at a cost which involves the couple in privations for several years to come. Apprised of the facts, long afterwards, the rich friend laughs heartily. "My dear, you shouldn't have bothered! It was only an imitation!"

Humour Conveyed by Sound.

Appropriate sound can be very advantageously used in slapstick and other comedies, and a sequence involving a whistle is said to be the most amusing feature of Chaplin's film, *City Lights*—(United Artists, 1930—not generally released). In a recent Mack Sennett picture, the rusty hinges of Andy Clyde's purse give an amusing squeak, and many comparable examples will occur to the reader. Under this heading we might possibly include the reproduction of a phonograph record. A song, "I want you here, Kitty", is being played on the Victrola (called in England the gramophone), but the record is defective at an early point in the track, whence a continuous repetition of "Here, Kitty . . . Here, Kitty . . ." The window is open, and in a few minutes the room is full of cats.

7. Masterpieces of Comedy.

Seven Years' Bad Luck—(Robertson-Cole, 1921).

Max Linder, after completing *The Little Café*, by which time he had become somewhat American in his methods, wrote and directed this comedy, and also of course played the principal part.

It was embellished with pretty girls, as follows:—

Station Agent's Daughter—Thelma Percy.

Maid to Max—Lola Gonzales.

His Fiancée—Alta Allen.

Hawaiian Maid—Betty Peterson.

and the men players included Henry Mann and Clarence Ward.

If Max had one weakness, it was superstition. Without necessarily sharing a belief in bad luck, the valet knew full well that trouble would follow his carelessness in breaking the full-length cheval mirror in his master's dressing-room. He could only adjure the maid to rush out and order a new glass as early as possible. Meanwhile the handsome frame could be carefully cleared of all broken fragments, and possibly its empty nature would pass unnoticed for a little time.

Unfortunately Max was in particularly punctual mood that morning, and the valet realised with horror that he was starting to collect his shaving things. If aught were to be done, 'twere well 'twere done quickly Max's second-best dressing-gown; a duplicate shaving-mug and razor; a hastily improvised moustache and a touch of the maid's eyebrow pencil—the spoof might pass: it was worth trying.

As Max entered his dressing-room and approached the mirror, his reflection of course came to meet him, in accordance with the formula— $2\frac{1}{4} \times \$79^2 p^2$. Brilliantly clear the reflection was, too, which facilitates shaving. There was plenty of soap in the mug, and Max stared hard as he realised that none of it seemed to be adhering to his face. Extraordinary! After three attempts which the mirrored image declared unsuccessful, he jabbed so fiercely at the mug—now fairly frothing over—that he dropped the brush on the floor.

Then came a discovery still more remarkable: the faithful glass, not content with picturing him with all the surface it could command, actually carried the campaign into the territory South of its frame, and reflected his feet!

So life-like an image could probably feel pain. Max slipped out, in search of something heavy.

As the reader has probably surmised, the last few minutes had been distinguished by the timely arrival of a gentleman from the glazier's, who bore a morning offering more



"THE IDOL DANCER."

BEAUTIES OF TODAY : America, Russia.



MISS GLORIA STUART.



Mlle. ANJUSCHA STENSKI.

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welcome than any ballad-extolled violets. And so
. . . . *meanwhile axe and lever (so to speak)*
Have manfully been plied.

"You gotta hand it to that guy," the returning Max thought, with a grim smile, for while it was now apparent that the realism of the image was slightly overdone, it would nevertheless have deceived most people. "Here's something else for you to reflect about," and he swung back his arm, imparting a graceful motion to a serviceable stick.

CRASH!

So started seven years' bad luck, immediately inaugurated by a chronic disagreement with his sweetheart, chiefly on the subject of "Pudgy", one of those little dogs so promiscuously covered with hair that you can't tell whether they are coming or going.

Safety Last—(Hal Roach, 1922. Fred Newmeyer).

The silent films of Harold Lloyd combined excellent construction with fine acting and the witty sub-titles of Harley M. Walker (with which Harold himself sometimes lent a hand). Everything is cleverly thought out, and although perhaps highly improbable, the incidents cannot be dismissed as beyond possibility. Smutty jokes and vulgarity have no part whatever.

Keystone films abounded in chance kegs of dynamite and stray barrels of tar, but in the Roach comedies a reasonable explanation would always be given to account for their presence. To take the absurd opening of *High and Dizzy*, and to explain to the best of my ability the manner in which, by the cumulative effect of a series of apparently connected incidents, Harold imagines himself to be dead and in Heaven.—

High, high up in a very tall building, Harold has pluckily gone to the rescue of a child's balloon which has

blown out of the window. On his way back [medium shot through another window, shewing rehearsal of a gangster play] he is held up at the revolver's point by a masked bandit, who makes it clear he is going to shoot. [Close-up of huge girder being cumbrously swung into position]. Involuntarily he steps back and shuts his eyes, waiting for the end. [Girder, bearing Harold, swings clear of the balcony. An electric light bulb is smashed in the room]. It is not long in coming. Just a bang, and all is over! Falling, falling . . . it is rather a lovely sensation. [Close-up of ornament on top of building—angel with folded wings. In a nearby apartment a girl's choir is singing "Angel Voices"]. One just feels deliciously wafted away to the end of space. Dare he open his eyes? Ah! What a lovely vision! the heavenly choir—so this is Paradise!

High and Dizzy provoked a succession of laughs and gasps. Although terribly imitated since, it was one of the first films to give a really convincing and alarming impression of dizzy height, and the fear of falling. Rudolf Arnheim remarks* that the cinema is at a disadvantage when it would convey height to an audience who do not feel the corresponding pull of gravity, but it was most effectively suggested in this picture.

To aerial thrills of this kind, *Safety Last* added a most interesting story.

The Pal—Bill Strother; The Girl—Mildred Davis
The Boy—Harold Lloyd; The Law—Noah Young
Floorwalker—Westcott B. Clarke;
Grandma—Anna Townsend.

It was agreed that the country youth should send for his lass as soon as he had made good in the great city (which would take perhaps a week or ten days—he had heard that New York teemed with opportunities for the wide-awake). The letters she received from him were almost boastfully

* "Film als Kunst."

confident, but actually Harold found several problems in city life; for instance, how to get to his shop in the morning. Readers familiar with the Elevated and street car services will sympathize. The department store was very keen on punctuality, and once when the boy was late, he was obliged to have himself carried in at the goods entrance, masquerading as a suit-model. Then again, the motor ambulance service was not bad, and passed the stores on its way to the hospital. (N.B. A fit is better than a supposed injury. The bearers must place your head at the driver's end; otherwise it is difficult to know when to signal the car to stop).

Understanding from his letters that Harold was now manager, at the least, Mildred paid him a surprise visit, and the situation called for very tactful handling. This boastful spirit was the cause of the boy's rising to a position of eminence in the establishment, as will be described presently, and is conveyed by the photograph.

A policeman who hailed from his village had gone up to a street telephone, and this gave Harold the idea of showing off to his pal, a budding circus performer. "You should see the pull I've got with the cops here! Go up and give him a good sock in the ribs, and watch how I put things right."

Harold insisted that the treatment was quite harmless, and your relations need never know. Unfortunately, while they were debating the advisability of the experiment, the officer had been replaced by another who knew not Joseph. His back view was deceptively similar: it was regrettable. Hence, in defiance of the maxim in the books on etiquette—that an introduction should be equally acceptable to both parties—Bill quickly decided that this was not a friendship that could ever ripen into love, whereas, to the policeman, Harold's pal was one of those people you want to see more of (or the equivalent in English).

The fellow's embarrassing attentions recurred two days

later, at the ceremonial opening of a huge new wing of the department store, for he had doubtless read an announcement, coupled with a photograph of Bill, regarding the chief attraction in the programme. The intrepid youth had, in fact, undertaken, as a publicity "stunt", to climb up the side of the towering building, and a vast crowd had assembled to witness the feat. As soon as the policeman was observed, with his hands all ready to clap, Harold was bluntly informed that it was clearly up to him to pretend to be the climber, and actually to scale the first storey. Bill faithfully promised to relieve him at the second storey, and at that height the substitution would not be noticed.

Although much more accustomed to a flat course, Harold did his best with the first lap, dreading that every moment was going to be his next. It was a sickening disappointment to find that Bill, although he was there to meet him as arranged, could not yet change places with Harold, as his enthusiastic following amongst the police had entered the building and lain in wait at the next floor window.

As will be observed from the photograph of Harold taking time by the forelock, the same hitch recurring at every storey, he was obliged to complete the whole climb.

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court—(Fox, 1920).

A splendid filming of Mark Twain's classic, dealing with the flutter caused by the introduction of up-to-date American methods in the English court of the sixth century. Harry Myers was the transmigrated Yankee, and Pauline Starke the innocent maiden, "Sandy", whom he rescued from the donjons of Queen Morgan le Fay (Rosemary Theby).

"Sir Boss" created the first flivver out of some rusty plates of old armour and a few odd nuts, and the natives

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were delighted with their Lizzie of Tin. Telephones and clocking-on brought a new fillip to industry, but Sir Boss had envious rivals at Court, and was accused of being a sorcerer. He demonstrated his power to the King (Charles Clary) by commanding night to fall in the middle of the day (for he had very fortunately remembered from his schooldays that a total eclipse of the sun had occurred on that date).

Twenty Minutes of Love.

I would place the date of this film at about 1911. I was only a boy at the time, sir, and I cannot remember which studio was responsible, but it was possibly Essanay (the period being too early for Keystone).

Twenty Minutes of Love was just a piece of senseless slapstick—the usual procedure of banging people on the head and throwing them into the pond (yes, we were already sick to death of this in 1911).

And yet how different it was! I have never seen anything funnier, before or since.

It may appear a strong statement, but it is nevertheless true that the knockabout "comics" of 1911 were as stupid as those of to-day, although princely salaries were not then paid to imbecile "comedy pairs". We had long since ceased to laugh at them, and they were effectively used at the end of a music-hall performance when it was desired to obtain a quick evacuation of the audience in preparation for the "second house".

Then came *Twenty Minutes of Love*, and without the slightest option or remedy, one was hopelessly, helplessly paralysed with laughter—the painful kind, when you have to fight for breath. The scene was Central Park, again, and two stretches of water were much in evidence, continuously occupied with receiving over-balanced bodies. Generally speaking, I can't imagine a more depressing background, for I think there is nothing sadder than ponds,

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custard pies and whitewash (and we are still saddened by them to-day, remember).

But this picture was different. I think it must have been the clever timing. Instead of a vigorous shove which sent the policeman hurtling into the water, the victim in this film would manage to stop his backward progress at the very brink of the pond, and the impetus would be ONLY JUST sufficient to make him over-balance. As he gracefully fell in, he would clutch at a perambulator, and send it careering down the slope towards the other pond. The p'ram. would quickly lose speed, and barely make impact with another man. The second victim, taken off his guard, would take a backward step, and over-balance ONLY JUST sufficiently to fall into *his* pond, when everyone thought he was saved.

It was foolish but funny, and if we must have slapstick, I wish it could be as nicely contrived as this.

Pimple in 'Trilby', with Fred Evans.

Not a masterpiece, perhaps, by to-day's standard, but absurd enough, and the funniest British comedy of pre-war days.

Svengali realised that after they had had the plumber in, it should be possible to make a fortune out of Trilby's voice—to say nothing of her feet, which would inspire respect anywhere. She was a nice girl, but it was dangerous to tease her, because, when annoyed, she was in the habit of bringing the weight of her foot down on her persecutor's toes, thus causing an immediate vacancy for a too-smart youth. Under the hypnotic spell, she could be induced to do anything she wanted to do, and Svengali's tense and concentrated attitude made the picking of his pockets too good a chance to miss.

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Mack Sennett Comedies—Two-reelers.

East Lynne with Variations—1920. Roy del Ruth.

Marie Prévost, Alice Lake and Ben Turpin in a withering satire at the expense of spoken melodrama.

Full-length Features.

Tillie's Punctured Romance—1914.

The most famous of the early feature comedies of full length (six reels). Mabel Normand, Marie Dressler and Charles Chaplin.

Married Life—1920. Roy del Ruth.

Miss Phyllis O'Haver as a ball-game fan; Ben Turpin, Harriett Hammond and Mack Sennett beauties. One of the scenes has already been described.

The Lunatic at Large (Hepworth, 1921).

Directed by Henry Edwards, from the story by J. Storer Clouston, with Henry Edwards and Chrissie White.

An exceedingly entertaining comedy, admirably filmed and with beautiful photography. The production would challenge the best work of any country.

Squibs Wins the Calcutta Sweep (Welsh-Pearson, 1922).

Miss Betty Balfour shews remarkable comedy genius in this study of a Cockney flower-girl.

She is assisted by Annette Benson, Hugh E. Wright, Mary Brough, Fred Groves and Bertram Burleigh. A first-class British production, directed by George Pearson.

Unconsciously funny:—

When Knighthood was in Flower (Cosmopolitan, 1922.

Robert Vignola)

A seriously-meant picture of English history, which gave great satisfaction in the States, on account of its complete

triumph over the difficulties that naturally face Americans when they set out to depict even modern English life. The complacency of the American Press was not reflected in England, where the film was unanimously received with derision, and re-christened "A Yankee at the Court of King Hal".* An illustrious personage, watching it from a box at the so-called "Scala" theatre in London, could not restrain his amusement at the antics ascribed to his royal ancestor, Henry VIII.

Miss Marion Davies effectively demonstrated that Mary Tudor was a bobbed-haired American chorus girl, and entirely new lights were thrown on other aspects of history by Lyn Harding, Forrest Stanley and Pedro de Cordoba.

8. The Great Directors and Their Creations.

In order to appreciate how films have acquired their present character, and thereby to form some conception of what they are capable of becoming in the future, it will be necessary, and perhaps interesting, to do a certain amount of delving into history. The cinema was at its best in about 1924, and at its worst in 1929, and this fact alone justifies my referring to a few old masterpieces, and enables me to discover as many ancient virtues as modern faults. Again, my duty is divided equally towards veteran picturegoers, who may like a reminder of films they have enjoyed but nearly forgotten, and modern young people who cannot possibly evaluate the cinema's possibilities, from the average talking programme of to-day.

No film will be mentioned by me unless it has some definite claim to inclusion in this book; but no priggish standard will be taken. I have omitted description of a great many screen plays because reference to them will be found ready at hand in other books.

In 1917, Mr. Griffith shewed that the film's message is contained not so much in any given strip of celluloid as in the rhythm obtained by the manner in which different

* "Picturegoer", November, 1922.

strips are arranged in sequence. To the mentality of the populace, Griffith is not the favourite director: he must give place to the time-serving provider of vulgar and empty spectacle and of would-be smart nastiness.

The enlightened student realises, though, that the inspired parallelism of *Intolerance* foreshadowed the brilliant cross-cutting of *Potemkin* and *The End of St. Petersburg*¹ (for the Russians have splendidly developed the talent that the Americans have almost rejected). Other readers may be unacquainted with some of these masterpieces, and they are strongly urged to take the first opportunity of viewing them.²

D. W. Griffith made, in addition, *Broken Blossoms*, *'way Down East*, *America* and *Isn't Life Wonderful*³, to say nothing of stories of popular appeal, such as *The Idol Dancer*, *The White Rose* and *The Two Orphans*. In producing *Intolerance*, he endowed the screen with a work of the greatest value and influence, conscientiously disregarding the supposed wants of film exhibitors.

The public taste, as I have suggested, does not always incline to artistry. "No really good film can be a roaring success".³ *Intolerance* and *Isn't Life Wonderful* were voted puzzling and tedious. For the benefit of the masses who dislike mental effort, Mr. Griffith flung a sop entitled "At the Grange" (*One Exciting Night*), and one or two similar pictures in the nature of an anti-climax. We need not here discuss the ungrateful public's criticism that they were carelessly constructed: did not Jupiter discerningly choose the best kind of king for the frogs?

There is danger that the cinema may shew too much, and it can certainly shew more than the stage. The master director considered that the screen should reflect the mental processes of concentration and recollection, and consequently the close-up and the flash-back are rightly regarded,

¹ Sovkino.

² Not as comic strips but properly shewn at 16 frames per second, with original sub-titles. See p. 123

³ L.G.P., p. 136

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to this day, as being essential components of true film (disregarding talking pictures, which will be discussed later). He discovered also (but this has not yet permeated the movie mind) that the director is everything, and great actors are quite unessential.

A remarkable suggestion for the direct presenting of mental concepts was offered, as an experiment, by Robert Wiene, for in the *Cabinett des Dr. Caligari*¹ the scenes were shewn as they would be viewed through the eyes of a madman.

Some American directors have definitely artistic tendencies, but this is no insuperable disadvantage when tempered by sound business sense. Several of them are musical, for instance, and Marshall Neilan was part-composer of the remarkable ballroom waltz "Wonderful One", which in its way may be considered the "Blue Danube" of the post-war period. Victor L. Schertzinger, amongst other compositions, re-arranged the Mexican love-song, "Marcheta", invariably called Muhkeeter on concert platforms.² Artistry as revealed in the film, however, is not a strong feature of the United States, and it was sheer insolence to refer to *Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness* as "The Swedish Earthbound".

The filming of Selma Lagerlof's powerful story was one of the triumphs of Victor Sjöström, who also made *The Secret of the Monastery*, with Tore Svenborg and Tora Teya. *Gösta Berling's Saga*, with wonderful Greta Gustafsson, was made by the late Mauritz Stiller, producer of *The Judgment* and *Snows of Destiny*.

Scandinavian pictures are not funny, but they display artistic sense and dignity which I am afraid our American movies will never have. "No subjects are made with higher ideals and with a more conscientious avoidance of

¹ Decla, 1919.

² Although Pasadena is in California, former Spanish territory, in the song of that name the word is made to rhyme with "greener"!

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the meretricious, and contempt for conventional ideas of 'what the public wants'."*

In Germany, Erich Pommer, F. W. Murnau, Ernst Lubitsch, Fritz Lang and G. W. Pabst rival the Swedish artistry, and add a certain brilliance and forceful treatment of their own. Let us take, for instance, an early example of inspiration from *The Joyless Street* (Sofar, 1923. G. W. Pabst):—

"Greta" (Greta Gustafsson) would fain resist Mme. Gill's infamous proposal, and demonstrates revolted determination. We view her reflection in the glass at the same time. But of the bordel-keeper the mirrored image alone is seen.

Remarkable photography and lighting of a macabre kind were seen in *The Golem*, *The Street*. Dr. Mabuse and *Warning Shadows*.

In France the Belgian Jacques Feyder made *l'Atlantide*, and Abel Gance was responsible for *J'Accuse* and *Napoléon*. Karl Dreyer, a Dane, directed *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*. Diamant - Berger made an exquisite version of "*Cinderella*".

By the hands of Trauberg, Eisenstein and Pudovkin, Russia has produced a number of pictures which, although scarcely entertaining, shew a genius for direction. Notable examples are *Armoured Cruiser Potemkin*, *Earth*, *The General Line* and *The End of St. Petersburg*.

For masterpieces from Italy, I fear, we must bewail the long-past: for England, we can only look to the future. This brings us back to the United States, the country so queerly responsible for both the best and the worst in films; and we may complete our analysis of masterly direction by examining the methods of von Stroheim and Charles Chaplin.

First, however, I must remark that the most popular director is Cecil B. de Mille, but I am quite at a loss when attempting to deal with his greatness. I must content

* Kinematograph Year-Book 1922

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myself with mentioning *Adam's Rib*, a simple and sincerely-told triangle story. The late George Loane Tucker made one undoubted masterpiece, *The Miracle Man*, which will be described presently.

One of the secrets of our mediocrity in America is that we have so many quasi-experts "on the job" that it's an Act of God if one gets any sense out of the completed film. The secret of von Stroheim and Chaplin, on the contrary, is their conviction that a director should insist on directing, and that a genius of the megaphone must have, like other geniuses, an infinite capacity for taking pains. It is an object lesson to watch one of them at work—Mr. Griffith surveying the farmhouse set for *'way Down East*, and discovering that the door-handle has too fresh an appearance; Charles Brabin rehearsing countless times the trickle of smoke from the suicide's revolver in *Driven*; "Mr. Von" drilling a squad, for hours at a time, in the salute of the Austrian army.

These great directors have made the rare discovery that film-making should be as far as possible a one-man task, and that consequently the one man—the director—must have a really practical knowledge of cinema technique in general. They will not leave to another a single operation of any consequence, and especially that most important one, the final cutting and editing of the picture. This principle is particularly thoroughly carried out by Count Erich von Nordenwald, otherwise Erich von Stroheim (or in film magazine baby-talk: "Eric Strome").

He insists on cutting his own films, and on taking his own time about it. He wrote, directed and edited *Foolish Wives*, in addition to playing the principal rôle in it, and would have been cameraman too, if this had been possible.*

* In the writer's opinion, it is essential that the director should be responsible for the photography, and von Sternberg combined both offices in *The Devil is a Woman* (Paramount, 1935—Modern version of Geraldine Farrar's *The Woman and the Puppet*).

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Charles Chaplin, who also has a profound knowledge of cutting the film strips, wrote, directed and acted in *A Woman of Paris*.

It is useless to expect Chaplin and von Stroheim to turn out a picture in a fortnight, with a low expenditure: they will probably take two years and use ten miles of celluloid. Mr. Von is, in fact, an expensive luxury to the studio employing him, and I must admit, also, that he is far from popular with the players. But he is definitely a genius, and will produce a picture like *Greed*, for any company who will bear with his tiresome exactions. Much conjecture exists as to the missing half of his *Wedding March*, which has never been assembled.

I may here remark that a contemporary writer, a warm admirer of Eisenstein, has expressed the opinion that von Stroheim cannot be a genius, as he is often called, because a genius would not waste so much negative in obtaining his effects. But surely no real genius of literature, painting or music would be so mechanically-minded as to decide in advance exactly how much work would be required for his chef d'oeuvre? I do not hesitate, therefore, to differ with that opinion, and, moreover, I was highly amused on learning recently that this writer's beloved Eisenstein used thirty-five miles of negative for *Storm over Mexico*!¹

9. *Twenty Film Masterpieces from Five Countries.*

To be enabled to give full appreciation of the film masterpieces of ten or twenty years ago, we must have grown up with them, and it does not follow that the greatness of a work of 1911 would be easily discernible to a spectator seeing it for the first time in 1936. This much is certain: no one can derive an intelligent notion of such a film by seeing it projected 50 per cent. too fast (for the modern speed is 24 frames per second), with the original sub-titles removed and replaced by a comic talking commentary.

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Past triumphs can, however, still be seen at a few picture theatres—for instance, the Forum, Villiers Street, London—and I recommend the experiment to any interested student of the screen. Failing this, it is in many cases possible to hire a sub-standard version of the film (9½ millimetres in width) from the excellent Pathéscope library, for projection by a “Home Movie.”

The Great Train Robbery (Edison, 1903. Edwin S. Porter. 800 feet).

Two armed bandits hold up an express train at a lonely spot, turn the engine adrift and steal a valuable cargo from the freight car. They escape on their horses, but are eventually captured after the gagged and bound signalman—their unwilling accomplice—has succeeded in freeing himself.

Distant and medium shots only, including interiors, convey an interesting story with an exciting climax.

A. C. Abadie, G. M. Anderson, George Barnes and Marie Murray.

The Adventures of Dollie (American Biograph, 1908. D. W. Griffith. 713 feet.)

A story, written by Mr. Griffith, of the kidnapping and subsequent rescue of a child who has fallen into the hands of gipsies. A new technique, involving flash-backs and close-up shots.

Quo Vadis? (Cines, 1913. Enrique Santos. 8 reels).

The greatest of the pre-war super-spectacles, which created a sensation even in America, and brought about the hiring of theatres for “special shewing” at theatre prices. Conscientiously and artistically made in Turin and Rome from the famous Sienkiewicz story, and giving excellent entertainment.

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Cabiria. (Cines, 1916. 8 reels).

A masterpiece with Francesca Bertini and an all-star cast, from a story by Gabriele d'Annunzio, displaying a remarkable set of the Temple of Moloch, and lavish spectacle in general. It was considered good enough to revive in 1922.

Intolerance. (D. W. Griffith, 1916. 12 reels).

Out of the Ages, endlessly rocking	Lillian Gish
A Mountain Girl	Constance Talmadge
Princess Beloved	Signe Aven
Belshazzar	Alfred Paget
Mighty Man of Valour	Elmo Lincoln
Babylonian High Priest	Tully Marshall
The Bride of Cana	Bessie Love
Mary Magdalene	Mildred Harris
Mary, the Mother	Lillian Langdon
The Pharisee	E. von Stroheim
Brown Eyes	Margery Wilson
Marguerite de Valois	Georgia Pearce
Catherine de Medici	Josephine Crowell
A Father	Spotiswoode Aitken
Dear One	Mae Marsh
The Boy	Robert Harron
A Friendless One	Miriam Cooper
Jenkins	Sam de Grasse
Mary T. Jenkins	Vera Lewis
State Governor	Ralph Lewis

Love, which has ever struggled against Intolerance throughout the ages, must finally triumph. The crime of Calvary left the world immeasurably blessed: even the horrible slaughter of the Huguenots can by Love be turned to good account. Our young hero of to-day, victim of the modern counterpart of Babylonian and Jewish oppression

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and lack of understanding, may be saved by just such love as could have rescued Brown Eyes, the Huguenot maiden, from the malice of the Old Dragon, Catherine.

Out of the Ages, endlessly rocking,
Uniter of here and hereafter.

Employed by a firm who are involved in a bitter industrial dispute, The Boy falls upon ill fortune, and is wrongfully convicted of murder. The Girl who was so pleasant a companion during a day at Coney Island is now his Dear One, moving heaven and earth to save him. Sweeter by far than the royal token of affection, charmingly borne to the Princess Beloved in a tiny dove-drawn chariot, is love's brave message of encouragement in the Court of Justice. No whit less portentous than the awe-inspiring onrush of the troops of Cyrus, and far more representative of the forces of Right, is the swift progress of the special train bearing the Governor, who alone can grant a reprieve.

Some wonderful scenes from this deathless masterpiece: The feast in Belshazzar's banqueting Hall. The advance of the Persian Army. The storming of the walls of Babylon.

Broken Blossoms—A Story of Love and Death. ("The Chink and the Child"—Thomas Burke). D. W. Griffith, 1918. 8 reels.

Lucy, the Girl	Lillian Gish
The Yellow Man	Richard Barthelmess
Batling Burrows	Donald Crisp

Lucy, a brutally ill-treated waif of Limehouse, inspires deep veneration in the heart of the Yellow Man, who gives her such companionship as she has never known from her countrymen. Their love is a beautiful thing. Surprisingly beautiful, too, is her metamorphosis under his care, and the murderous father has difficulty in recognizing the clean and carefully-tended girl, radiant in a rich oriental dress.

BEAUTIES OF TODAY: England, Poland.

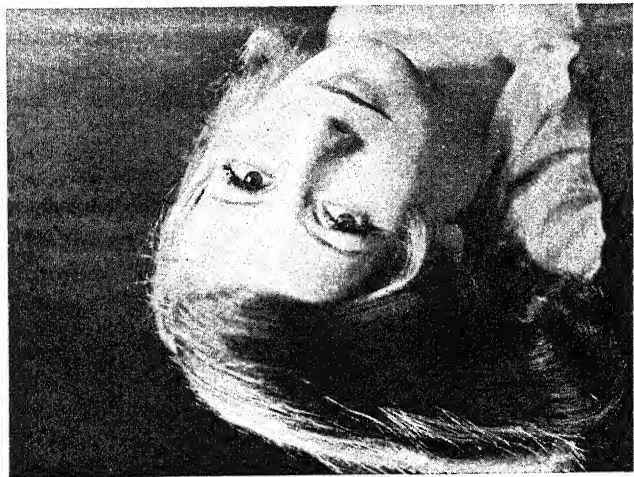


MISS VERONICA ROSE.



Mlle. LYDA ROBERTI.

BEAUTIES OF TODAY: Sweden, Germany.



FRÖKEN GRETA GUSTAFSSON.

PL. XVIII.



FRÄULEIN MARLENE DIETRICH.

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Battling Burrows, in collusion with Evil Eye, wreaks vengeance upon the Yellow Man for the supposed wrong, and chastises his daughter with a brutality that proves fatal.

Blood-thirstiness admittedly is an unworthy passion; but there are few moments in our recollections of the screen, I must confess, that give more solid satisfaction than the depicted end of Battling Burrows, slowly crumbling to the ground as the Yellow Man's revolver is unhurriedly emptied, shot after shot.

Incidental music:—"A Pagoda of Flowers",
"Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune" (Debussy),
Prélude, Op. 28, No. 17 (Chopin).

The Miracle Man. (Mayflower, 1919. George Loane Tucker. 8,200 feet.)

Story by Frank L. Packard.

Ten years ago *The Miracle Man*, *Intolerance* and *Broken Blossoms* were quoted as the three greatest films ever made. Whereas *Broken Blossoms* was an exceptionally beautiful tragedy, and *Intolerance* a grand theme, presented by means of four separate stories, strikingly interwoven, *The Miracle Man* can hardly be called more than just a tale.

The picture's remarkable success seems to have been due partly to the strongly dramatic nature of the story and partly to the excellent direction and casting, the policy having been to place film value first, without regard to the desirability of a "starring vehicle".

Some curious coincidences were remarked. George Loane Tucker, the director, had recently been cured by Christian Scientists, after the Californian doctors had despaired of his life. The part of "Rose" was given to a beautiful young touring musician named Lucime Compson, who, changing her name to Betty, had appeared in certain bathing comedies, but attained only indifferent success until this "miracle" happened.

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She gives a remarkable study of a girl's regeneration from cynical unscrupulousness.

Rose—Betty Compson; the Patriarch—J. J. Downing; Claire King—Elinor Fair; Tom Burke—Thomas Meighan; Mrs. Higgins—Lucille Hutton; the Frog—Lon Chaney; The Dupe—J. M. Dupont; Richard King—W. Lawson Butt.

A quartet of tricksters, led by Tom Burke, operate in the neighbourhood of San Francisco, or wherever else the exigencies of the service may dictate. "The Dupe" is little more than an expert pickpocket, but Rose is a decoy of somewhat scientific methods. "The Frog", a contortionist, collects much profitable compassion by his convincing study of a virtually limbless freak. Each evening they pool their winnings, and taking one thing with (and from) another, it is a fairly remunerative game, although Tom is always ready to consider new methods and recent advances in technique.

As the result of a tactless misunderstanding, the city is temporarily deprived of the society of The Dupe. He forwards a strange report from the remote country village which he has enriched by his visit: It appears that an imposture or "ramp", on a bigger scale than they have ever conceived, is being practised with impunity by a plausible veteran who claims to be a faith-healer. To his pretty cottage come all kinds of sufferers, and not merely from the village, because people from outlying towns have heard of his powers.

There seem to be enormous financial possibilities, and the gang go down to investigate, deciding to offer the valuable propaganda services of The Frog, in return for partnership. The Frog's miraculous "cure" naturally causes no inward astonishment to his companions during their preliminary survey of the territory, but some of the other

manifestations are less easy to explain, and eventually the plotters are driven to conclude that the healing is genuine, and moreover that the Patriarch is not covetous of money.

Their revised offer is therefore to constitute a committee, with Rose as treasurer, to enlist support and subscriptions for the ostensible purpose of building a large and well-organized Temple of Healing.

The deception becomes steadily more and more distasteful to the erstwhile callous gang, and one by one they secede from the conspiracy, until the old man's greatest miracle is unwittingly accomplished.

A wonderful moment from *The Miracle Man*:—"The Frog", coming to the forefront of the group of spectators outside the cottage, untwists his warped body, pretending to have been cured (a fine piece of work by the late Lon Chaney). His turn is followed by an obviously genuine crippled child, and to the gang's stupefaction, he is cured also.

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari. (Decla, 1919. Robert Wiene. 5,800 feet.)

Werner Krauss, Lil Dagover, Conrad Veidt and Hans von Schlettow in the remarkable impressionist film already mentioned, in which the crazy and distorted scenery is an important factor.

'way Down East. (D. W. Griffith, 1920. 12 reels).

Elaborated from the famous stage play by Lottie Blair Parker.

Anna Moore—Lillian Gish; David Bartlett—Richard Barthelmess; His Father—Burr McIntosh; Eccentric Aunt—Florence Short; Mrs. Bartlett—Kate Bruce; Lennox Sanderson—Lowell Sherman; Martha Perkins—Vivia Ogden; Yokels—Porter Strong, George Neville and Edgar Nelson.

Anna, a simple country girl, is offered a holiday with her smart relations in Boston, in whose society she appears a trifle uncouth. A whimsical aunt takes a hand, and Cinderella's beauty, fairly blazing in a wondrous frock, reduces an entire ballroom to gaping silence.

The winner in the resulting rush is the scoundrelly Lennox Sanderson, who forthwith places the girl's name high up on his list, and eventually tricks her into a bogus marriage.

After months of wretchedness and ill-health following on the deaths of her mother and her baby, the friendless Anna finds peace in the employment of an Eastern squire, and drifts into a hopeless return of the affection shewn by his son David. By a chance discovery, her identity is revealed to a village gossip, and on learning her secret, the puritanical farmer drives her from his home. Bewildered and in despair, plunging in the teeth of a snow storm of unusual violence, she collapses on the brink of the frozen river. It is the period of the dangerous break-up of the ice floes at White River Junction, Vermont, and Anna is rapidly whirled in the direction of the falls.

Her rescue is a task of extreme difficulty and danger, but is finally accomplished by David.

Incidental music:—"Home, Sweet Home" on muted violins and harp. A typical melody for each character, written by Louis Silvers and William F. Peters. An original melody, with variations, representative of the unfolding of the drama. "At Dawning" (Cadman). Traditional songs.

For the exquisite photography, the famous Billy Bitzer had the co-operation of a Polish cameraman named Sartov. The method employed in photographing the marvellous rescue scene has not been revealed to the public, and is still a mystery to the writer.

The famous old melodrama, which may perhaps be described as a blend of "Cinderella" with the American

favourites, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and "Her Fatal Wedding", has undoubtedly given pleasure to hundreds of thousands, but it cannot be denied that some of the lines were a trifle crude.

Mr. Griffith's film version, although equally well-adapted to popular entertainment, abounds in artistry and charming sentiment. In my view it is not so much melodrama as a simple chronicle of life, for it contains no improbable situation—the sham marriage, for instance, being unfortunately a common tragedy in the States.¹ One or two English critics have described the film as awful melodrama, but they do not give reasons for their objection, and I should imagine they have never seen the stage play. In any case it would seem somewhat gratuitous to offer, at this date, adverse criticism of a play which has been so often and successfully presented in every town in the country, during the last forty years.

It reminds me of one of the few occasions when I have detected a lapse on the part of my respected good friends, the "Picturegoer" staff. In reviewing a film of *The County Fair*,² they reported that it had a hackneyed plot. Quite so, and Shakespeare is full of hackneyed quotations, and Chopin's *Waltz in D flat major* is an evident crib from a popular fox-trot.

Some wonderful scenes from *'way Down East*:—

Spring.

Evening in the cornfields.

The snow-storm.

The rescue scene above the Connecticut River.

Love scene near the falls.

Innocence: As Anna is standing near the porch, a dove settles on her shoulder.

The dismaying task—a remarkable piece of symbolism, reflected six years later by similar shots in the Russian

¹ Although a criminal offence under, e g., New York State Penal Laws, Section 2175.

² An American stage classic.

films, *Ghost that Ne'er Returns* and *End of St. Petersburg*:—The unfortunate outcast is seen, with a heavy bundle, pausing at the foot of a straight, narrow and very steep path, whose weary length extends at an angle, until it is cut off by the top right-hand limit of the screen.

Snows of Destiny. (Swedish Biograph, 1920. Mauritz Stiller).

A lovely piece of Swedish artistry, played by Mary Johnson from the story of Selma Lagerlöf.

Foolish Wives. (Universal, 1921/2. von Stroheim).

Her Highness the Princess Vera Petchnikoff—Mae Busch; H. E. Capt. Count Wladimir Sergius Karamzin—Erich von Stroheim; Princess Olga—Maude George; Maruschka—Dale Fuller; Helen Hughes—Marguerite Armstrong; Andrew J. Hughes—Rudolph Christians; Marietta Ventucci—Malvine Polo; Her Father—Cesare Gravina.

Three *soi-disant* exiles of the Russian aristocracy rent an expensive villa in Monte Carlo, although they have qualified for free official quarters provided by the State and People of New York. To help with their expenses, they conduct a private roulette establishment in which they practise a "system" far more infallible than those essayed at the official Casino. Their plans for success are, however, ruined by the inordinate lasciviousness of the male partner, who is tactless enough to include the wife of the American ambassador amongst the many women marked down for his prey.—"As a pageant of sin it has no equal." (*Evening News*, London).

The extravagant Mr. Von complains that no one has seen his masterpiece in its entirety, as he wished it to extend to at least 22 reels, and the length allowed by the Company was twelve reels. Renters have reduced the footage

yet more, which is unfortunate, but I shall still love to see the film, even when it has shrunk to a one-reel scenic of Monaco.

His bitterest enemy could not say that von Stroheim spared either money or pains in this production. He was indeed too expensive for the Universal Company, who were obliged to dispense with his services in the middle of *Merry-go-round*; but if they are sensible they will engage him afresh. Practically the whole of Monte Carlo—the Prince's Palace; the Casino and gardens; the Theatre, Hôtels and Sporting Club—was erected in California especially for this one film. To shew the villain's trait of cruelty, an elaborate scene was staged to present him shooting pigeons. To shew his cowardice—merely for one scene lasting two or three minutes—we were given a fleeting view of a villa on fire, and the scoundrelly Count too fond of his skin to save an imprisoned girl.

Not only so, but the atmosphere was definitely caught, for the first time in American film history. The little tramway, the fire-engines, the police and soldiery, the peasant's hut in the neighbouring hills—all were the genuine article, and would defy detection by the most experienced European.

The Ambassador and his wife stood out as glaringly, typically American in an environment typically Continental, and we cannot give higher praise than this.

Magnificent production is joined to superb photography, and the following remarkable scenes may be recalled:—

The night carnival in the Bay.

Karamzin induces the poor little Russian maid to lend him her savings.

Maruschka, betrayed by her versatile master, resolves on suicide (a fine sequence by Miss Dale Fuller).

Karamzin, calling on Ventucci by night, sees the half-witted Marietta asleep. As he prizes open the blinds

of her bedroom, a beam of light casts the shadow of a crucifix on to her forehead.

The Judgment. Selma Lagerlöf. (Swedish Biograph, 1922. Mauritz Stiller).

Karin—Mary Johnson; Victor Svenson—Einar Hansson; Fru Svenson—Pauline Brunius.

The proud mother, unmindful of the fact that the family fortunes were made by a herdsman of reindeer, contemptuously rejects Victor's sweetheart, a violinist in a troupe of strolling players.

Those fortunes are now at a low ebb, and Victor, who inherits his grandfather's simple ambitions, joins a reindeer-trading expedition. He is seriously injured in a stampede of the animals, and loses reason and memory. Perpetually before the lad's disordered imagination comes an apparition of a sinister, terrifying reindeer. On the first occasion it bore between its great antlers a kaleidoscopic vision of previous events—the arrival of the strolling players in his courtyard; his meeting with Karin; the stormy scene with his mother; Karin's illness and their growing love—but memory has departed, and only the vague menace remains.

Conflicting loves unite to make an experiment. On a bright afternoon, Victor is led to his window overlooking the courtyard. A troupe of strolling players arrives, and a dance and other items are presented. Then Karin takes out her violin and starts to play.

L'Atlantide. (Film d'Art, 1922. Jacques Feyder. 13 reels).

Antinéa—Napierkowska; Capit. Morhange—Jean Angelo; Tanit-Zerga—Mlle. M.-L. Iribe; Lieut. St. Avit—Georges Melchior.

The scorching heat of the desert and the thrilling mystery of a buried kingdom are vividly conveyed in this film version of a classic legend, as penned by Pierre Benoit.

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A Woman of Paris. Charles Chaplin. (United Artists, 1923—Charles Chaplin).

Marie St. Clair—Edna Purviance; Pierre Revel—Adolphe Menjou; Fifi—Betty Morrissey; John Millet—Carl Miller; Paulette—Malvine Polo; St. Clair—Clarence Geldert.

A brilliant piece of sophistication and directorial excellence.

Greed. ("McTeague"—Frank Norris). Metro-Goldwyn, 1923. E. von Stroheim.

Trina—Za-Su Potts; McTeague—Gibson Gowland; Mrs. Sieppe—Sylvia Ashton; Sieppe—Chester Conklin; Mana—Dale Fuller; Marcus Schouler—Jean Hersholt.

A terribly grim and tragic chronicle of a woman's lust for gold. Once again von Stroheim's genius is asserted, especially in his masterly treatment of atmosphere, which in this case is inexpressibly sordid.

Die Nibelungen. (Decca, 1924, Fritz Lang).

Kriemhild—Margarete Schoen; Siegfried—Paul Richter; Brunhilde—Hanna Ralph; Volker—Bernhard Goetzke; Ute—Gertrude Arnold; Gunther—Theodor Loos.

This production, artistic to a degree, conveys the legendary atmosphere as only the Germans could reproduce it. The glorious photography and Ruttmann's settings delight us at every point, and perhaps particularly in the charming "Dream of the Hawks".

The Last Laugh. (U.F.A., 1924. F. W. Murnau).

Emil Jannings in a wonderful study of a hotel porter. He is supported by Maby Delschaft, as his daughter, George John and Emil Kurz.

Perfectly told in terms of the cinema from first to last, and without a sub-title.

Battleship "Potemkin". (Goskino, 1925. S. M. Eisenstein).

Produced at No. 2 Studio of the Soviet Kinema Organization, and dealing with a mutiny in the Black Sea in 1905. The crew of the *Potemkin* took arms against their officers, and the insurrection quickly spread to other parts of the Fleet. The tone of the film does little to condemn their action, but the production is inspiringly forceful in its brilliant handling of masses, contrasts and parallels, which in the writer's opinion constitutes the correct function of the cinema. The admirable photography is by Eduard Tissé.

Metropolis. (U.F.A., 1926. Erich Pommer and Fritz Lang).

Mary—Brigitte Helm; Eric Masterman—Gustav Frölich; His Father—Alfred Abel; Heart-machine-foreman Grot—Heinrich George; Inventor Rotwang—Rudolf Klein-Rogge.

A somewhat socialistic extravaganza by Thea von Harbou, said to have been inspired by "Mercury" Wells's scientific anticipation, "The Sleeper Awakens". "Deep, deep down in the bowels of the earth lies the city of the workers", whereas the cursed rich, thudding about in their solid gold cars, bask in the sunlight, and all that sort of thing.

Rotwang has discovered how to create life, and when Mary, a pretty girl of plebeian stock, becomes an influential power amongst the workers, it seems a good idea to manufacture a double of her. Not only will two Marys go farther than one, but the synthetic copy may prove to be more amenable than the original, and highly useful for propaganda purposes.

The community is almost enurely run by mechanism, but it is essential that the main control board, or "heart machine", should be under constant supervision by a

human being, and some exciting incidents occur in this connection.

However, the majestic settings and the glorious photography will concern us more than the story—the immense aerial city of the future; the inspiring views of sinister machinery; the beautiful scene in which the Mary model is imbued with life.

La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc. (Société Générale, 1927.
Karl Dreyer).

Most poetically beautiful of all French films, conventional prettiness being entirely supplanted by the harmonies of rugged strength. Madame Falconetti, far removed from the usual painted heroine, gives a superb rendering of Joan.

10. *The Beautiful and the Vulgar; the Romantic and the Commonplace.*

TRAGEDY.

*Nessun maggior dolore,
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice,
Nella miseria.*

If we accept the sentiment thus voiced by Francesca,¹ which seems to be in agreement with Pindar's

οὐκ ἔστι δ' ἔμμεν
τοῦτ' ἀναιδέατον. καλλὲ γυνώσκοντ' ἀνέγκη
ἔστω ἔχον πόδα ;

¹ Inferno. Canto V Sir E. Sullivan renders:

"No deeper sorrow is
Than to recall a time of happiness in misery's
hour."

² "Pythagoras," IV 570/2.

we shall be led to conclude that the merely all-gloom film production is not pure tragedy (despite the apparently contrary view of certain writers who would include such pictures as *Greed* and *Polikushka*). The depth of extreme sadness becomes more apparent when sounded from the height of joy: the majority of sentimental romances accentuate the sweetness of their blissful ending through having previously noticed, with Virgil, that

Love's feet are lightly shod with pain.

The reader will receive without surprise the suggestion that the cinema has only rarely constituted a suitable medium for the expression of lyric grief, and we can only hope that no talking-film producer will ever attempt a twang-tragedy.

The first film tragedy? :—

Chûte des feuilles (When the Leaves Fall). Gaumont, 1911. Two reels.

Beautifully produced in colour, with incidental music from Glück. At the time when the Chevalier is producing his "Orphée" in Paris, a young poet has a short-lived romance with a maiden of aristocratic birth, and is slain by her scornful father.

Broken Blossoms, 1918—already noticed.

The Garden of Poisoned Flowers. (Gaumont Fine-Art, 1920).

Continued suspense and a feeling of imminent disaster culminate in a powerful tragedy. Beautifully played by Madeleine Sève, André Nox, Charles Dullin and M. Tallier.

Excitement.

The last-minute rescue formula, first employed to cause excitement in a film of 1896, continues practically unchanged to-day. For instance, in *Wax Museum* (Warner,

1933. Michael Curtiz), a madman utilizes living girl victims, whom he transforms into statues by covering them with wax. We see one of these girls lying helpless on a bench, and the wax has already started to pour from the cauldron at the moment of her rescue by a girl reporter.*

The "last-minute" is still later, though, in *Gallant Fool* (Monogram, 1933), a circus picture containing a stirring incident of two trapeze artists. Through foul play, the girl performer's rope has been cut, and is rapidly becoming severed, a hundred feet above the ground. Her partner makes desperate efforts to approach her, and at each succeeding swing the increased impetus brings his trapeze nearer. Up to this point, of course, the situation follows quite familiar lines—but wait! Instead of being just in time, the man is a fraction of a second too late, and the girl falls when the rapidly approaching trapeze is still several feet distant. The man now flings himself downwards to hang by his feet, and barely contrives to catch the falling girl in his arms. This marvellous piece of timing provoked spontaneous applause from even the sated audiences of 1934.

I suppose the greatest of film thrills was the rescue of Anna from the ice-pack in *'way Down East*. By dint of incredible efforts, her unconscious form is snatched into safety. Fascinated, we watch the swift progress, and the precipitation over the falls, less than two seconds later, of the actual boulder of ice on which she reclined! The excitement is even greater than in the ride of the Clansmen in *The Birth of a Nation*.

The first train film was perhaps the *Black Diamond Express* (Vitagraph, 1898), and many railway thrillers have appeared since, such as those of Kalem in about 1910; *A Ride on a Runaway Train*; Goldwyn's melodramatic *Red Lights* (1923) and the present-day *Murder on the Runaway Express*.

* Lionel Atwill; Fay Wray; Glenda Farrell.

Crime and Mystery.

The earliest of the elaborate crook dramas must surely have been *Zigomar*, produced by the Eclair Company of Paris in 1911. A few readers will remember the mystery and excitement of this film, excellently produced, and abounding in secret trapdoors and deadly mechanical devices. Its high quality was afterwards repeated in a sequel.

Dr. Mabuse. (Dekla Bioscop, 1922. Fritz Lang. 24 reels).

Apart from a limited shewing of the long-delayed *Passion*, it is said that until the release of *Dr. Mabuse*, in May, 1923, England had seen no German picture since the war. Although it was then reduced to 14½ reels in length, this subject could not be shewn at one performance, and the best plan was to see the first half on Wednesday and the remainder at the change of programme on Thursday.

An undoubted masterpiece of detective thrillers, with wonderful lighting and photography, and remarkable characterizations by everyone. Rudolf Klein-Rogge, particularly, shewed himself a master of make-up.

Countess Tolst—Gertrud Welcker; Mabuse—Rudolf Klein-Rogge; Cara the dancer—Oud Egede Missen; Count Tolst—Alfred Abel; Police Chief de Witt—Bernhard Goetzke; Edgar Hull—Paul Richter.

Dr. Mabuse was again on view in London in 1934, although banned in Germany.

The House of Whispers. (Brunton-Hodkinson, 1921).

Fritzi Brunette, J. Warren Kerrigan and Margery Wilson* in an absorbing mystery. The ingenious plot is of a quality far above to-day's average.

* It is not practicable to quote the full cast and other details of all these films, but I presume that readers requiring further information will write to ask me for it.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

Life. (Famous Lasky, 1922. Travers Vale).

(No connection with the Italian film of the same name)

A wonderfully-produced thriller, chock-full of romance, mystery and excitement, splendidly handled and with capital acting.

Arlene Pretty and Jack Mower; Nita Naldi, Rod la Rocque and Effingham Pinto.

One Hour before Dawn. (Pathé American, 1921).

Anna Q. Nilsson and H. B. Warner in a suspense film that many will remember.

The Open Door. (Hallmark, 1919).

A most interesting landmark, denoting the third stage in American films—Mr. Griffith's methods, together with speed and extreme brilliance. I should be glad to know the name of the director.

The appearing of this finely-photographed film, in 1920, provided a new and stimulating experience that also took one's breath away. Brilliant, as I have said, was the only way to describe it. A large clock-face would be shewn on the screen, instantly dissolving into a car rushing towards the spectator at a dizzy speed, and pulling up within a bare six inches. And so was every phase of the mystery conveyed, at an exhilarating pace from start to finish, and providing entertainment which is by no means common to-day.

Anna Lehr and Diana Allen; John P. Wade, Frank Evans and Edmund Breeze.

The Serial.

Hero:—But supposing the rope breaks while I'm hanging over the precipice . . . ?

Director:—Say! That's a great hunch!

The curious thing about the serial is that whereas in practice one never comes across a lover of this irritating form of entertainment, it nevertheless persists to this day. Serials generally open quite serenely, in an old-world mansion or its pretty garden, but a fleeting appearance of Warner Oland, towards the end of the second reel, gives us a well-founded premonition of dirty work.

Then starts the bewildering medley of secret passages, ancient treasure-charts and malignant emissaries of a foreign Power. The mysterious hooded character flits about the place, and we vainly strive to conjecture "which side he's on". At the final unmasking, when we could have sworn the hood concealed Jack So-and-So, it turns out to be Bill What-not, although a rival hooded character masquerades as Pete, who is masquerading as Two-Gun Nick.

The earliest serial, to the best of my recollection, was Colonel Selig's *Adventures of Kathlyn*, shewing Miss Kathlyn Williams and a lot of wild animals, many of them four-footed. This must have been in about the year 1912. Edison's *What Happened to Mary?*—1911 or 1912—introduced the first famous serial heroine, Miss Mary Fuller. Colonel Selig's celebrated Zoo became quite an institution after that, as I have already mentioned, and as late as 1920 the overworked animals were signed-on for another of his serials, concerning a hidden town in the jungle. This was a production of somewhat evil omen, for the original hero and heroine both collapsed under the strain of the first two reels, and a plucky and beautiful girl who completed the film as leading lady, falling a victim to drugs, subsequently had to retire from pictures.

Greatest of all serials:—

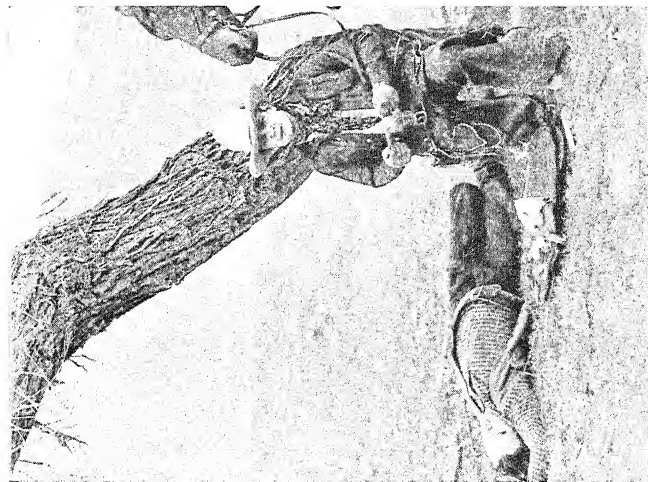
The Exploits of Elaine. (Pathé American studios, 1915. George B. Seitz. 15 episodes).

Elaine Dodge—Pearl White; Craig Kennedy—Arnold

FAMILIAR SCENES



THE CROOKED SHERIFF.



THE LETTER EXPLAINS ALL.

FAMILIAR SCENES

(*left*).—"Later. The twitter of baby footprints smoothed the lines of care away."



(*right*).—All time is lost that is not spent in love.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

Daly; Butler—Creighton Hale; The Clutching Hand—Sheldon Lewis.

Based on an American novel with a scientific flavour. According to this picture, Miss Pearl White's beautiful golden hair was fireproof, damp-proof and dust-proof.

Best Serial I have ever seen:—

Les Deux Gamines—"Two Little Urchins". (Gaumont, 1920. Louis Feuillade. 12 episodes).

Ginette and Gaby—Sandra Milowanoff and Olinda Mano; Their Mother—Violette Jyl; Chambertin—Biscot; Mlle. Rollette, Blanche Montel, Gaston Michel and Ed. Mathé.

The interesting and laughable adventures of two beautiful children in Paris. Lovely photography, charming sentiment and the priceless Biscot. How different a serial can be!

Very good indeed:—

Les Trois Mousquetaires. (Gaumont, 1922. Henri Diamant-Berger).

The Queen—Jeanne Desclos; d'Artagnan—Aimé Simon-Girard; Constance Bonacieux—Pierrette Madd; Athos—Henri Rollan; Milady—Claude Merelle; Porthos—M. Martinelli; Aramis—P. de Guingand.

This was at least the fourth or fifth refilming of the famous romance, and a further attempt—an American film of ordinary feature length—appeared at the same time. Douglas Fairbanks shewed much of the spirit of d'Artagnan, but the United Artists' effort naturally had a very serious rival in the native-made version. This disadvantage was largely overcome by cutting down Diamant-Berger's thirty-six reels to make, for American purposes, the seven-reel picture "Milady", which the Press were happily

justified in describing as "complicated, and at times difficult to follow".

Worst Serial I have ever seen:—

Hidden Dangers. (Vitagraph, 1920).

Jean Paige and Joe Ryan in an execrable perpetration, which should never have passed censorship. The very worst embodiment of sensational, rubbishy and impossible episode-nightmares.

Honourable mention:—

Lloyd of the C.I.D. (Universal-British, 1932).

Very, very poor. Comparatively harmless, which is more than can be said of *Hidden Dangers*, but naive beyond description. Would have been rejected as utterly childish in 1915. It would be grossly unjust to quote the names of the hapless players.

Very poor:—

Bride 13. (Fox); *Elmo the Mighty.* (Universal)—about 1920.

Unconsciously funny:—

Captain Kidd. (Star Serial Corpn., 1922. J. P. McGowan).

A 15th-Century bobbed-haired American chorus-girl, buccaneers and frilled retainers, scrambling down the wall of a modern tenement building.

The Amazing Quest of Mr. Ernest Bliss. (Hepworth, 1920).

Henry Edwards and Chrissie White in the first British serial (five chapters), based on the story by E. Phillips Oppenheim. An excellent subject, dealing with a millionaire's boast that he can earn his living, without any help from his money.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

Judex. (Gaumont, about 1920).

The famous French detective serial, with Yvette Andréyor as Jacqueline, and the late René Cresté as "Judex "

Fighting Blood. (Robertson-Cole, 1923. 12 episodes).

An amusing series by the humorous writer, H. C. Witwer.

Drama.

The Devil (First National, 1921).

A splendid film from Molnar's play, with Lucy Cotton and the two British players, George Arliss and Sylvia Breamer. One of the outstanding performances that we would willingly see again and again (and surely that is the test).

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. (Paramount, 1920. John Robertson).

John Barrymore, Martha Mansfield and Nita Naldi in a fine interpretation of the well-known book and stage play. Barrymore's rendering of the double rôle is world-famous, and although H. B. Irving did wonders on the stage, and a gallant attempt at a talking picture was made recently, the silent screen is definitely the medium for Stevenson's fantastic theme.

A Doll's House. (Allied Artists, 1921).

The incomparable Nazimova in an unforgettable Ibsen rôle.

Earthbound. (Goldwyn, 1919. T. Hayes Hunter).

Naomi Childers and Wyndham Standing in a notable film dealing with the hereafter. This production was a blend of English and American. Treated with Continental dignity, the theme would have made a masterpiece.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness. (Swedish Biograph, 1921. Victor Sjöström).

The highest possible application of the cinema to dramatic and artistic ends, mentioned in this section only for the purpose of comparison with *Earthbound*, which it is quoted as faintly resembling. It would, however, require a lively imagination to visualise Death the Waggoner comparably portrayed by Americans. This masterpiece is magnificently played by Astrid Holm, Hilda Borgstrom, Victor Sjöstrom and Tore Svenborg, from the story by Dr. Selma Lagerlöf. Will the screen ever again reach this level?

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. (Metro, 1920. Rex Ingram).

A world-famous picture of war and sex, with an enormous all-star cast which I cannot be bothered to quote. It seems to have been a great success, and a Trade Show acquaintance told me she had obtained tickets to see it on five occasions.

Girl of the Sea. (Republic, 1920).

"A fine drama of the tropic seas, showing Betty Hilburn and Chester Barnett"—*Pictures*. Splendid underwater scenes, photographed, of course, by the Williamson process, depict the town youth's rescue from a shark, by the experienced island girl. I have already referred to the living sub-titles

The Goose Woman. (Universal, 1925. Clarence Brown).

Miss Louise Dresser, who is supported by Constance Bennett and Jack Pickford, gives a fine study of an eccentric recluse.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

The Great Impersonation. (Famous Players, 1921).

A fine story by E. Phillips Oppenheim, excellently produced and acted. The star is supported by Ann Forrest, Fontaine la Rue, Alan Hale and Winter Hall.

"A German spy and an English gentleman impersonate each other, and James Kirkwood impersonates both, and lives up to the title. A war story, but excellent entertainment"—*Pictures*.

"You don't know who is who until the tail end of the picture . . . you would never think that the same man played both parts"—*Photoplay Magazine*.

Heliotrope. (Famous Players, 1921).

Molly Hasdock—Julia Swayne Gordon; Heliotrope Harry—Fredk. Burton; Alice—Diana Allen; Mabel Andrews—Betty Hilburn; Jimmie Andrews—Wilfred Lytell.

Harry Hasdock is greatly disturbed at the reports which reach him in prison as to the infamous conduct of his wife, and its effect on the upbringing of their daughter, Alice. Although condemned to a life sentence, he is specially permitted by the Governor to visit his home for the purpose of saving the girl. A powerful theme, with an admirable performance by Julia Swayne Gordon as the unscrupulous mother.

Remarkable moment from *Heliotrope*:—

Even before opening the fateful letter which has arrived for her, Mrs. Hasdock realises, with the deepest misgiving, that it is scented with heliotrope.

J'Accuse. (Pathé, 1919. Abel Gance)

A powerful indictment of official corruption, based on Zola's famous letter. Marise Davvray and Romuald Joubé.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

The Jacket. (Hodkinson or Shurtleff, 1920).

Once more some daring liberties are taken with Jack London, and I am bound to admit that the alleged basis of "The Star Rover" has produced a most entertaining and thought-provoking film. It will be remembered that the suspect, during fits of unconsciousness induced by police torture, wandered into previous existences in other worlds. In this version the brutal third-degree "jacket" enables the victim (Courtenay Foote) to discover by clairvoyance the facts concerning a murder in a New York theatre. Thelma Percy is an extraneous but perhaps acceptable sweetheart who brings action against the prison authorities.

Manon Lescaut. (U.F.A., 1926).

Lya de Putti is dead, and Marlene Dietrich is now in American films. It is therefore particularly profitable to remember their excellent work in this well-constructed version of the famous tragedy.

Manon—Lya de Putti; des Grieux—Vladimir Gaidarov; Claire—Trude Hesterberg; The Marshal—Eduard Rothauser; Micheline—Marlene Dietrich; Manon's Father—Siegfried Arno.

Miarka, Child of the Bear. (Mercanton, 1921. Jean Richepin).

One of the last films to have Réjane in the cast. The name part is taken by Desdemona Mazza, and the players also include Jean Richepin (author of the story) and Ivor Novello.

Michael Strogoff. (Universal de France, 1926).

An interesting Russian production, with Ivan Mosjoukine as Jules Verne's hero, and Natalie Kovanko as the graceful Nadia.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

Moral Fiber. (Vitagraph, 1921).

A good example of the work of Corinne Griffith, an extraordinarily pretty girl who appeared for the Vitagraph and First National companies. Contains also Catherine Calvert, famous in the Civil War picture, *The Heart of Maryland*.

A young girl has sworn to carry out a revenge, when she grows up, against the vampire who caused her brother's death. "A very strong love story, exceptionally well acted and produced"—*Pictures*.

The Passion Flower ("La Malquerida"—Jacinte Benavento). First National, 1921. Herbert Brenon.

A good example of the work of Miss Norma Talmadge, who plays well in a tense drama of illicit passion.

Revelation. (Metro, 1919).

Nazimova and Charles Bryant in an exceptionally fine film of legend and regeneration

The Red Lantern, Eye for Eye, Out of the Fog . . .
Yes, the Metro Company were justified in the record salary paid to "the incomparable Nazimova", who, when necessary, could simply walk away with the part of a girl of seventeen.

The Secret of the Monastery.

Another magnificent Swedish masterpiece made in 1922 by Victor Sjöström, with Tore Svenborg and Tora Tey.

Snowblind. (Goidwyn, 1921. Reginald Barker).

Sylvie Doore—Pauline Starke; Pete—Cuilen Landis; Mary Alden and Russell Simpson.

A fine example of the snow-scenery film, with a strongly dramatic theme of a girl's temporary loss of sight. Excellent entertainment.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

Sorrell and Son. (United Artists, 1927. Herbert Brenon)

This notable picturization of a favourite Warwick Deeping story was one of the last of the silent films. Anna Q. Nilsson and H. B. Warner as the Sorrells, with Nils Asther as Christopher; Mary Nolan, Alice Joyce, Carmel Myers, Norman Trevor and the late Louis Wolheim.

Stella Dallas. (United Artists, 1925. Henry King).

A very successful filming of a pathetic deserted-wife story by Olive Higgins Prouty, admirably played by Belle Bennett, Ronald Colman and Jean Hersholt.

Also :—

Laurel Dallas—Lois Moran; Richard Grosvenor—
Douglas Fairbanks, Junior.

A Woman's Law.

Olive Tell and Tallulah Bankhead in a heavy drama of 1919. It will be news to many that Miss Bankhead was a well-known featured player at that time.

* * *

Comedy.

Away Goes Prudence. (Famous Players, 1920).

Billie Burke, whose delightful work is still at the service of the screen, in a comedy of an independent young lady who flies her own aeroplane.

Be My Wife. (Robertson-Cole, 1922).

A fairly good Max Linder comedy, played with Viora Daniel, Alta Allen and Rose Dione. The familiar theme about a young man who has to find a bride within a certain time.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

Go West. (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1925. Buster Keaton).

An absurd story of Buster Keaton's pioneering efforts on the Diamond Bar Ranch, shewing also Howard Truesdale as the ranch-owner, and Kathlyn Myers as his daughter.

The Love Expert. (First National, 1920. David Kirkland).

Babs makes a deep study of the heart, and has to arrange the love affairs of several other people, who are in her path, before she is free to unite with her own scientific choice. An excellent comedy, typical of the unique archness of Miss Constance Talmadge.

Madame Sans-Gêne.

A pre-war effort (I believe), unforgettable for the work of the late Réjane in Sardou's comedy of a laundress who demands audience of the Emperor Napoleon, and then confronts him with an old bill which young Bonaparte had omitted to pay. An American version of 1925, if it was designed to shew that such a film should be made in France, and that Mme. Sans-Gêne is not intended to be a young sex-heroine, was fully successful.

Polly with a Past. (Metro, 1921).

The first film* made by the stage beauty, Ina Claire; a very bright comedy of a pretty parlourmaid who impersonates a French actress, to oblige three young men in a difficulty.

Remodelling her Husband. (Famous Players, 1920).

A splendid example of the inimitable style of Miss Dorothy Gish. James Rennie is the husband in question.

* Except, perhaps, for very early Lasky appearances.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

The Village Sleuth. (Famous Players, 1921).

Some amusing and eventually successful methods are adopted by a farm boy with criminologist leanings.

Pinky Wagner—Wimfred Westover; Willy Wells—Charles Ray.

It is possible that we may see Charles Ray in films again.

* * *

Satire and Cynicism.

Bonds that Chafe. (Swedish Bio., 1921).

A display of Juvenalia at the expense of Hollywood films, excellently photographed and acted, and shewing that Scandinavian humour is not an unknown thing.

Karin Molander, Lars Hanson and Tora Teya.

Le Chapeau de Paille d'Italie. (Albatross, 1925. René Clair.

A nasty smack at French middle-class life, played by Olga Tschechowa and Albert Préjean.

A Forbidden Paradise. (Paramount, 1924. Ernst Lubitsch).

We seem to have folded a serpent to our buzzom when we invited Ernst Lubitsch to Hollywood: the Pola Negri film, *Forbidden Paradise*, shews real ingratitude to the hand that dollared him. However, very few of us are keen enough to perceive that our guest is being cheeky.

Some readers will have a clearer recollection of *The Love Parade*, a talking picture made under the same auspices in 1930, with Jeanette Macdonald and Maurice Chevalier in the leading parts. The film is pleasing enough, but there are moments now and then which cause the very perspicacious amongst us to raise an eyebrow, never so slightly. For instance, the film opens by shewing a motor-coach party of American tourists, sight-seeing in Sylvania, see?

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

They are more than a little bored with their cicerone's assurances regarding the antiquity and historic fame of the royal buildings, but when he mentions that the palace cost two million dollars, everyone looks up with sudden keen interest.

This seems to me to be an attempt to make fun of our noblest ideals.

Later on, the Queen is shewn with some of her ministers, and in the course of a conference on affairs of state, she raises her dress, saying, "There is only one leg in Sylvania to match this . . ." and thereupon she displays her other leg.

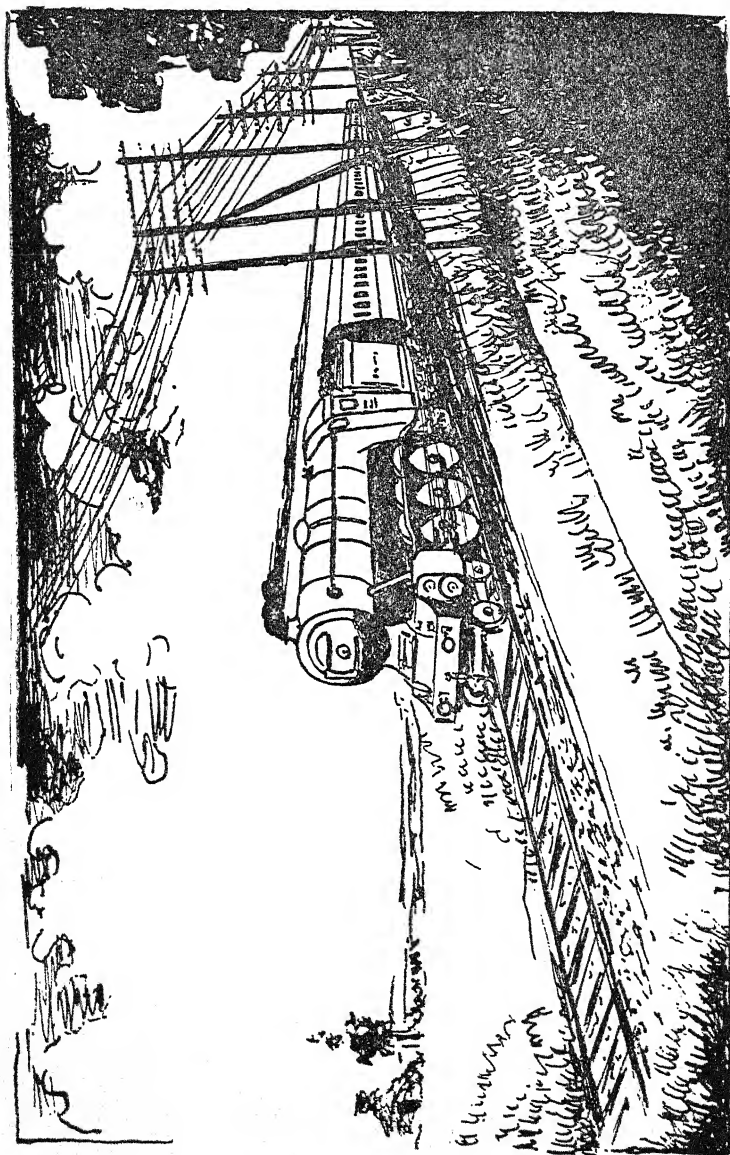
All very reasonable, and so much in keeping that few Americans would make any comment on the everyday incident in Court life. But I cannot help suspecting that, with Teuton insolence, the director fellow is again trying to be funny. I recall a parallel case where the English waxed sarcastic about *When Knighthood was in Flower*, because Miss Marion Davies, as "Mary Tudor", was similarly told to "cover up that leg, hussy!"

The Man from Toronto. (Gainsborough, 1932. Sinclair Hill).

Includes, as an interpolated incident, a masterly and devastating skit on English village life.

The Queen's Affair. (British and Dominions, 1933. Herbert Wilcox).

A cruel satire on Balkan Kingdoms and Paris journalism, the avaricious American and the mercurial Latin. For those upon whom delicate irony and blunt cynicism may alike be lost, there remains a pleasing romantic tale, easy to understand.



Contrasts and parallels from "The Queen's Affair"

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

Anna Neagle and Fernand Graavey; Muriel Aked and Gibb McLaughlin. Excellent.

A brilliant shot from *The Queen's Affair* (too subtle for most audiences):—

The deposed President is fleeing the country, with a price upon his head. On our left we see the express train rushing him towards safety, speed and action inspiring hope. On the right is the still menace of the telegraph-wires—a heavy, clogging net-work.

Doubting Thomas. (Fox, 1935. David Butler).

The late Will Rogers in a satire on amateur theatricals, based on George Kelly's well-known play "The Torch-bearers."

* * *

Artistry and Pictorial Beauty.

Suwani River. (Fredk. W. Burlingham, 1921).

The loveliest natural landscape I have ever seen, either in a film or from actual experience in eleven countries. The Su-wani, or "Echo River", rises in the Okefenokee Swamp, Georgia, and flows through Florida to the Gulf of Mexico. During part of its course it is navigable, and this delightful film, taken from a gently-moving boat, admirably catches the delicate tracery of the foliage, and the exquisite beauty in which it is "echoed" from the tranquil surface of the water

Passions of the Sea. (R. A. Walsh, 1922. Photographed by Clyde de Vinna).

Lorna—Pauline Starke; Capt. Blackbird—House Peters; Madge—Rosemary Theby; Lloyd Warren—Antonio Moreno.

Glorious scenes in a South Sea tale filmed on the isles of romance.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

Do you Remember? (Hepworth, 1922. Gaston Quiribet).

A girl turns over the leaves of her album, containing photographs of lovely English countryside visited during various holidays and expeditions. As each happy occasion is recalled, the scene grows, filling all the mental horizon, and bursting into life.

Lovely natural scenery was depicted also in *Moana*, *White Shadows of the Southern Seas*, certain other productions of R. J. Flaherty, and *The Love Flower*.

So far as synthetic beauty is concerned, we must mention von Stroheim's *Wedding March*, Karl Freund's work in *Metropolis* and the undermentioned oriental stories:—*Arabian Nights*. (Ermolieff, 1923. V. Tourjansky).

Natalie Kovanko and M. Lissenko.
Kismet. (Robertson-Cole, 1920. 8 reels).

Hajj—Otis Skinner; Marsinah—Elinor Fair; Kut-el-Kulub—Rosemary Theby.

Two pretty phantasies:—

Moongold. (Dramafilms-Warren, 1922. Will Bradley).

A most artistic romance of Harlequin and Colombine.
Dabbling in Art. (1920).

Prettiest of Mack Sennett comedies, although this example is more charming than comic.

So far as colour photography is concerned, we have Douglas Fairbanks' *The Black Pirate* (United Artists, 1925), an exceedingly pretty wedding scene from *Whoopee* (United Artists, 1931. Thornton Freeland), and the Duchess of Richmond's ball in *Becky Sharp* (Pioneer, 1935. Rouben Mamoulian). I was inclined to the idea that *Becky Sharp* was based on "Vanity Fair", but the titles make no mention of Thackeray.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

Beautiful scenery is happily unaffected by the drawbacks otherwise attaching to the dialogue film, and thus we have—

Loveliest of all artificial film spectacles:—

Dance of the Singing Violins, from *Gold-Diggers of 1933* (Warner, 1933. Mervyn Leroy and Busby Berkeley).

Two lovers (Ruby Keeler and Dick Powell), singing a duet at the water's brink, cast a blossom of *nénuphar* into the lake, whereupon is born a host of maidens who, having danced enchantingly and taken up the refrain of the duet, appear as living water-lilies in an ornamental pool.

Of a cleverness untarnished by subsequent cheap imitation, this scene is also artistic to a degree.

Murder at the Vanities—Earl Carroll (Paramount, 1934. Mitchell Leisen) contains a lovely tropical beach scene in which the Pacific breakers are charmingly simulated by an undulatory movement of tinted ostrich-feather fans.

* * *

Lavish Spectacle.

Cinema-goers cannot have failed to notice the degree in which most films of historical subjects lend themselves to expensive decoration. The glory that was geese and the gander that was Rome, as Mr. Ashley Sterne says,* (although here I think he misquotes the incident of saving the Capitol) were nothing to the gorgeousness that is Cyril C. de Billion's when he records the life of, let us say, Voltaire, the famous French electrician.

You see, even if some of us suspect that the pomp of Balkis, Cleopatra or Mme. Dubarry is rather overdrawn, no one living can definitely refute Satin Cyril's version from memory. That's the beauty of it. To neglect to take advantage of such an opening is to miss a golden opportunity with one's eyes open, even as Mr. Winston

* "Passing Show," London.

Churchill, Chancellor of the British Exchequer, failed to avail himself of the convenient option of having every Minister's initials painted on the door of his allotted office in the House of Commons.

The Glorious Adventure. (Prizma-Stoll, 1922. J. Stuart Blackton).

An impressive and interesting colour film with a complicated plot.

Lady Beatrice Fair—Lady Diana Manners; Nell Gwyn—The Hon. Lois Sturt; Charles II—William Luff; Rosemary—Flora le Breton; Pepys—Lennox Pawle; An Adventuress—Stéphanie Dangerfield; Bulfinch—Victor McLaglen.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame. (Universal, 1923 Wallace Worsley).

Esmeralda—Patsy Ruth Miller; Quasimodo—Lon Chaney; Fleur de Lys—Winifred Bryson; de Chateaupers—Norman Kerry; Marie—Eulalie Jensen; Gringoire—Raymond Hatton.

The Queen of Sheba. (Fox, 1921. J. Gordon Edwards. 10 reels).

A very ambitious spectacle, containing some colossal sets and an exciting chariot race. The historical accuracy has been much criticised.

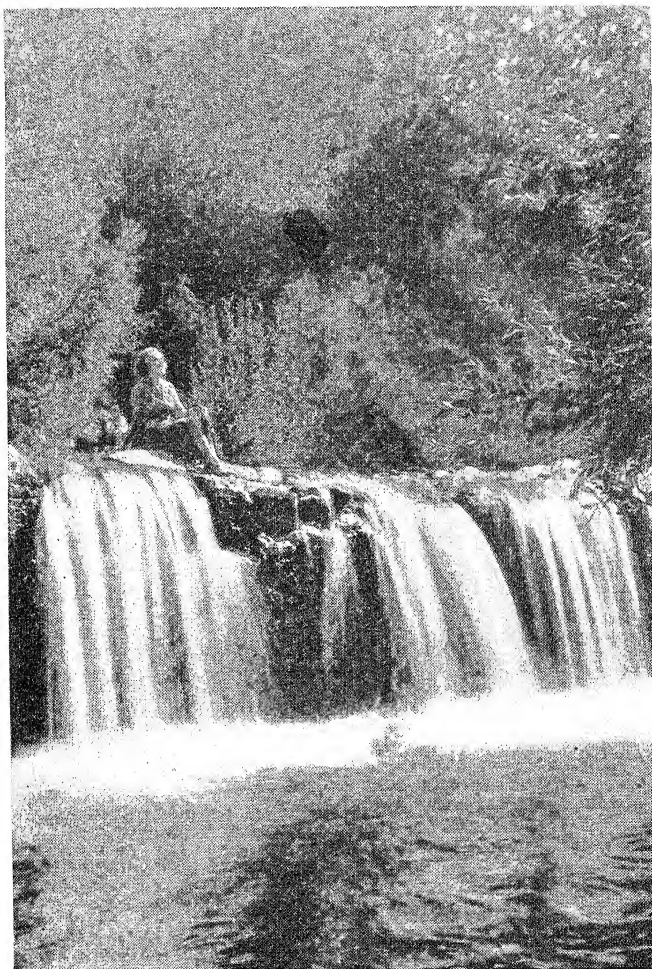
Sheba—Betty Blythe; Solomon—Fritz Lieber; Joan Gordon, Nell Craig and little Pat Moore.

Robin Hood. (United Artists, 1923. Douglas Fairbanks).

Lady Marian—Enid Bennett; Robin Hood—Douglas Fairbanks; Friar Tuck—Willard Louis.

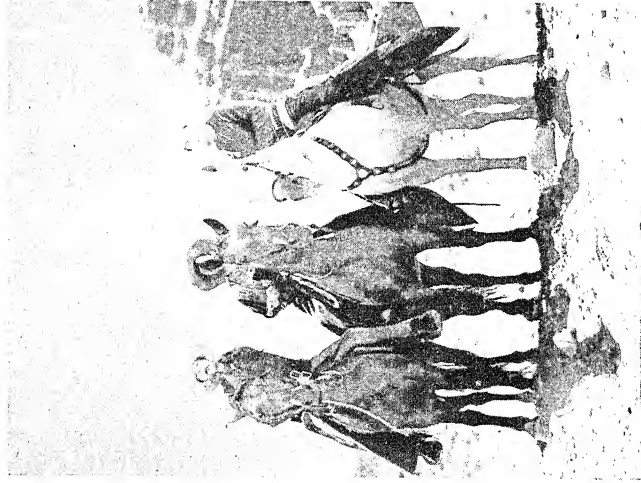
Very colourful and entertaining, and the accuracy of the settings is near enough to pass.

FAMILIAR SCENES

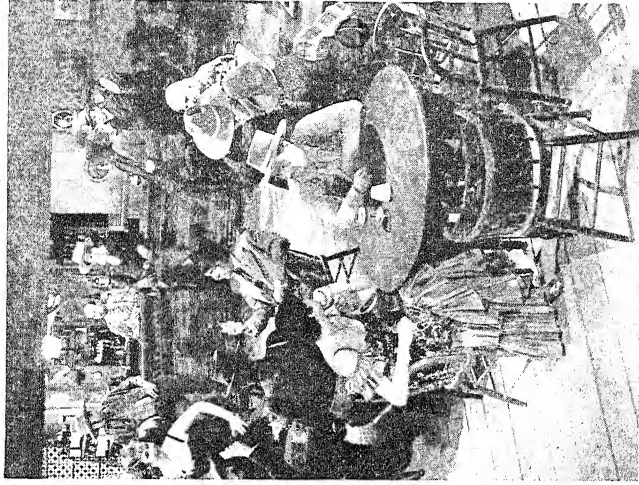


THE ROMANTIC TRYST.

FAMILIAR SCENES: Colorado, Klondyke.



ROUNDING-UP (COWS).



PROSPECTING FOR GOLD.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

Theodora. (Unione Cinematografica, 1921).

An enormous spectacle of ancient Rome and the not very lovable Byzantine Empress Theodora (Mlle. Rita Jolivet).

The story leaves little impress upon the memory, beyond teeming crowds and huge sets, although I dare say it is fairly faithful to Sardou's text.

Sentiment and Romance.

Adam's Rib. (Paramount, 1923. Cecil B. de Mille).

An ingenious story by Miss Jeanie Macpherson, who has so often previously collaborated with Mr. de Mille in giving us sincere and unassuming films shewing the simple annals of the poor. A cosmopolitan cast indeed, with an American father, a Danish mother, a British daughter and a Russian lover.

Marian and Michael Ramsay—Anna Q. Nilsson and Milton Sills; Their daughter — Pauline Garon; Prof. Reade—Elliott Dexter; M. Jaromir, alias King of Morania—Théodore Kosloff.

Silly Marian Ramsay imagined herself to be in love with the exiled King of Morania. Matilda was definitely smitten with Nathan Reade, the brilliant young Professor of Natural History, but couldn't get the fellow to think of anything but his prehistoric beasts. At any rate, she could and did give him a good fright by climbing on to the back of the (so he said) valuable Brontosaurus in the museum, and of course he had to lift her down. It was uphill work, but a steady course of treatment induced him to relinquish ancient Adam for modern Eve.

Faced with her parents' trouble, however, Matilda sacrificed her newly-found happiness (for her scheme unfortunately necessitated estranging herself from Nathan).

Clever moment from *Adam's Rib*:—

Breaking into the dingy museum, little Miss Garon perches herself on to an enormous prehistoric monster.

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The absurd and yet apt contrast is made more pointed through the inclusion of an "insert" in which the characters are transported to a cave-age setting.

Classmates. (American Biograph, 1912).

This first filming of the favourite story included Blanche Sweet, H. B. Walthall, Marshall Neilan and Lionel Barrymore.

Daddy-Long-Legs. (United Artists, 1919).

Seven years later, the same Marshall Neilan directed this world-famous Mary Pickford film, with Mahlon Hamilton as Jarvis Pendleton, and Betty Bouton as the spiteful Julia.

The Love Special. (Famous Lasky, 1921).

An agreeable memory of the late Wallace Reid, one of the most likeable of all screen heroes. Another lost favourite, Theodore Roberts, is a railroad president, and Agnes Ayres his daughter.

Over the Hill. (Fox, 1921. Harry Millarde. 9,500 feet).

A very famous mother film, with an admirable performance by Mary Carr. Quite a change from luxury and sophistication, and good enough to be reissued in 1927—possibly since then. From Will Carleton's poem, "Over the Hill to the Poor-house". The rest is easy.

Peter Pan. (Paramount, 1924. Herbert Brenon).

Who would have thought that the Barrie atmosphere could have been so effectively caught by an American cast? The director, however, was Irish, and the casting of the part of Peter was made after very careful selection. Influence counted for nothing at all, and dozens of world-

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

famous stars were disappointed when Sir James agreed to the choice of Betty Bronson.

Wendy—Mary Brian; Captain Hook—Ernest Torrence; Mrs. Darling—Esther Ralston; Tinker Bell—Virgie B. Faire.

Shadows. ("Ching, Ching, Chinaman"—John Wilbur Steele). Preferred Pictures, 1923.

Two other departed players appeared in this very interesting and human picture—Marguerite de la Motte and Lon Chaney—the cast including also Priscilla Bonner, Harrison Ford and Walter Long.

Sin Yen, the laundryman (Lon Chaney), fatefully landed in a small and gossipy village, brings peace of mind to several of the perplexed inhabitants.

Fine photography, artistic treatment and a reasonable presentation of everyday life, whereas in most American films the people's dwellings are "home" only in the sense that there's no place like them.

Souls for Sale. (Goldwyn, 1922. Rupert Hughes).

Yet two more artists who are no longer with us—Barbara la Marr and Lew Cody.

"Novel of a girl who sought fame in Hollywood. A revelation of life in the film capital and behind the scenes"—Official.

Unofficially it must be described as a bit of a leg-pull.

Remember Steddon—Eleanor Boardman; Frank Claymore—Richard Dix; Robina Teale—Mae Busch; Tom Holby—Frank Mayo.

Thelma. (F.B.O., 1922. Chester Bennett).

Thelma—Jane Novak; Olaf, the Bonde—Bert Sprotte; Britta—Barbara Tennant; Sir Phillip Errington—Vernon Steele; Lady Clara—June Elvidge; Dyce-worthy—Harvey Clark.

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"Thelma" has several times been filmed, or, as Miss Corelli would say, "cruelly mutilated", but this version has much to recommend it. The name part is played by a favourite beauty who is a genuine Scandinavian, and according to its lights the film is carefully made. Americanisms creep in, of course, and the synopsis describes Sir Phillip as "the young English lord".

But the wild romantic scenery, splendidly photographed; the quaint customs and strange head-dress; the pathetic story and the girl's haunting prettiness—all conspire to leave an indelible impress.

The Thief of Bagdad. (United Artists, 1925. Raoul Walsh).

A colourful and thrilling romance with Douglas Fairbanks and Julianne Johnstone, imitated from those deathless Oriental tales of "the golden prime of Harun-er-Raschid". Several players of Eastern races were included; for instance, Anna May Wong.

When we were Twenty-One. (Pathé American Studio, 1921).

An outstandingly charming love story, from the delightful book by H. V. Esmond. No silly sentiment or jarring incongruities, but the sincere and excellent performance we always expect from H. B. Warner, one of the few men who wore evening dress correctly in American films.

The simple establishment of a serious-minded bachelor is conducted by a widowed housekeeper. When her only child was about to leave school, the mother had readily obtained permission for the girl to join her, and assist with the household duties. The arrangement works very happily: both women adore their employer, who is the soul of chivalry and kindness.

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When, in his judgment, it is time to give earnest consideration to the girl's future welfare, he personally selects a suitable companion of her own age, and expresses the hope that they will find happiness together. The girl thanks her guardian very prettily, but makes it clear that she cannot envisage the possibility of an engagement to the young man so thoughtfully provided. Too simple-minded and unselfish to read the message of promise in his ward's beautiful eyes, the master of the house is hurt at this first instance of unwillingness to comply with his wishes. Some delicate *ménagement* is necessary, but the girl eventually conveys that, as her own happiness is alone in question, she is justified in moving a slight amendment to the resolution originally proposed.

* * *

Very carefully cast, with Claire Anderson as the charming girl, Minna Grey as her mother, and James Morrison as the young man.

The reader may wonder why so many of the films here quoted are of the vintage of 1919 to 1923, but I say definitely that very few pictures of to-day are of this quality.

* * *

The Outdoors Film.

The charm of Western pictures, and other films of spacious landscape, is an undoubted as it is difficult to define. Occasionally I find amongst non-travelled Europeans a reluctance to admit that there can be strong appeal in a chronicle of the Western States of America, of the bazaars of Cairo or life in a small English village, and of course it is impossible to devise a convincing argument which will bring about a change of viewpoint. Either we love these sources of romance or we are entirely apathetic towards them. It is not necessary to be a country dweller in order to appreciate Ballantyne and Stevenson, and many people other than Americans are thrilled by Zane Grey and Jack London, Curwood and Rex Beach.

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But while from an ethical standpoint there must be irreconcilable differences of outlook, technically it cannot be disputed that the fast-action outdoors story furnishes ideal screen material.

Bob Hampton of Placer. (First National, 1921. Marshall Neilan).

The first film in which the crowd scenes were photographed from a balloon.

Commemorates a disastrous episode in American history—the tragedy of the 4th June, 1876, when the U.S. Cavalry under General G.A. Custer perished in an expedition against the Sioux Indians in Montana.

James Kirkwood, Wesley Barry and Marjorie Daw.

Burning Daylight. (Hodkinson, 1920).

Splendid entertainment is provided by this well-known story of a rough diamond's progress from the Klondyke to Wall Street.

Mitchell Lewis and Helen Ferguson.

Cimarron. (Radio, 1931. Wesley Ruggles).

The title of Edna Ferber's book is a place-name, but primarily a Spanish word meaning "wild", and pronounced Theemarron. This very notable and excellent film is fully described in Mr. Paul Rotha's book, "Celluloid".

Yancey Cravat—Richard Dix; Sabra Cravat—Irene Dunne; Estelle Taylor, Nance O'Neil and many others.

The Covered Wagon. (Paramount, 1923. James Cruze).

Molly Wingate—Lois Wilson; Will Banion—J. Warren Kerrigan; Jackson—Ernest Torrence; Bridger—Tully Marshall.

Deals with the first Californian gold rush of 1849. A theme film, not strong in story value, which appealed to

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Americans, but was less acceptable to others on account of the nauseating over-publicity with which it was heralded.

The Flaming Frontier, or The Indians are Coming. (Universal, 1925. Edward Sedgwick).

A recent attempt to revive interest in the old Cowboy-Indian blend. Two titles, two cowboy stars, two sweet-hearts and too late.

Dustin Farnum and Hoot Gibson; Anne Cornwall and Kathleen Key; George Fawcett and Noble Johnson.

Gun Justice. (Universal, 1933. Harry J. Brown).

A fine Western talking picture, with Ken Maynard, Cecilia Parker and Sheldon Lewis.

The Iron Horse. (Fox, 1924. John Ford).

Another theme film, stirringly depicting the struggles and discouragements of the pioneers who laid the American railways, in the face of bitter opposition from Indians.

Madge Bellamy and George O'Brien; Gladys Hulette, J. Farrel Macdonald and Charles E. Bull. Romance, comedy and splendid landscape photography.

Riders of the Purple Sage.

This splendid romance was re-filmed by Fox in 1925, but a greater number of readers will remember the previous wartime (Fox) version, of which the cast was as follows:—

Jane — Mary Merch; Lasseter — William Farnum;
Millie Erne, the Masked Rider—Kathryn Adams; Ven-
ters—William Scott; Oldring—Charles Clary.

* * *

Novel Plots.

Brewster's Millions. (British and Dominions, 1935. Thornton Freeland).

In order to qualify for a legacy of several millions, a young man is obliged to spend a quarter of a million pounds

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in a few months. The money must not be given away, and in spite of the struggling youth's brave fight to keep ends from meeting, the restrictive conditions involve him in deep financial difficulties. At the point when careful spending is about to be crowned by triumphant pennilessness, some more of the wretched money will come rolling in from an overlooked source.

It is a heartbreaking battle against fearful odds, until, at the eleventh hour, he conceives the idea of flying a distress signal from his yacht, cheered by the certain knowledge that the resulting salvage bill will more than cover the contingency.

Double Speed. (Famous-Lasky, 1919. Sam Wood).

Young Speed, the millionaire's nephew, piqued at the taunt that he could never earn his own living, changes his name and becomes a chauffeur.

A damsel who has engaged his services, and wishes to "get even" with another girl, bribes him to impersonate young Speed, the millionaire's nephew, whom it appears he faintly resembles.

Wallace Reid and Wanda Hawley.

Dusk to Dawn. ("The Shuttle Soul"—Katherine Hill).

First National, 1923. King Vidor.

Marjorie Latham is the twin incarnation of an Indian girl, Aziza, with whom she frequently finds herself changing places.

"Amazing story based to definite, authentic cases of one life for two bodies". (Official).

A romantic and pleasing subject, very well photographed, acted and produced, except for an unconvincing tiger hunt in the forests of Indifornia. Miss Florence Vidor works hard to cover up the identity shortage, and Norris Johnson and Jack Mulhall have prominent parts.

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Evergreen.

Since the earliest times, elderly females have striven to be young, but the genuinely youthful Harriet Green pretends to be sixty, and makes appearances throughout the country, backing up her claim by faked certificates.

"Evergreen" was brilliantly produced as a stage play by C. B. Cochran, but the 1934 filming of it is not so successful, the refreshing novelty of the plot having been entirely missed by stressing the wrong viewpoint. In the film, Harriet impersonates her mother, and therefore by implication assumes a ripe age; but the daring brilliance of the idea is lost when we regard it merely as an attribute of impersonation—an age-old rather than an old-age theme.

General John Regan. (By George A. Birmingham).

A go-ahead American with a mischievous sense of humour, disgusted at the sleepiness of a small Irish village, engineers a colossal hoax upon its inhabitants.

Professing to be amazed that no memorial exists to commemorate their "most distinguished native, the late General John Regan", he suggests that a monument be erected and publicly unveiled forthwith, and promises a substantial donation. The blarney of a young doctor lends colour to the story and enthusiasm to the scheme, and the Lord Lieutenant himself narrowly escapes being involved in the imposing ceremony that has arisen from this plausibly-conveyed fiction.

Filmed by the Stoll Company in 1920, with Milton Rosmer, but it is hardly suitable material for a silent film. Splendidly made with dialogue in 1933 by Henry Edwards (British and Dominions); notable for glorious photography and a priceless performance by Mr. Edwards as the cajoling doctor. Miss Chrissie White is charming as his sweetheart.

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The Masquerader. (First National, 1922. 7,500 feet).

A really memorable piece of screen entertainment is offered by the *Daily Mail* prize novel, "John Chilcote, M.P."

A chance meeting during a fog on the London embankment causes two men to perceive that they are exactly similar in features. John Chilcote, who has somewhat sinister reasons for wishing to disappear, arranges for his double to impersonate him in Parliament and elsewhere, and even the wife is deceived by the resemblance.

Here is a marvellous rôle for the actor: to impersonate yourself, and yet shew some nameless shades of difference between the two characters. It is emphatically a film opportunity, for the amazing resemblance could not be so convincing on the stage. Incidentally it may be mentioned that the dramatic power is lost when we essay a talking picture of what is definitely the province of true film.

The famous American stage actor, Guy Bates Post, does wonders in the dual rôle, and Barbara Tennant is an admirable partner as the wife of John Chilcote.

Silent Evidence. (British Screenkraft, 1922. C. C. Calvert).

Marjorie Hume, Winifred Nelson and David Hawthorne in what was doubtless the first film of television, dealing with a scientist's view-finder invention, and what it revealed to his wife.

* * *

British Progress.

I have already remarked that England was responsible for the first kinematograph specification in the world (and this has been established in the American courts), the first film play, the first story film and the first movie theatre in the world. This being so, it is surprising that the British should for some years have had the reputation of making

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films inferior in quality to those of other countries, even compared with our technique in the States (which, Heaven knows, is nothing to boast about). English photography and lighting are often very poor, right up to the present time, and yet they can be excellent, and the landscapes in many Hepworth pictures were so lovely that even we in America had to give them grudging admiration.

British films are both better and worse than those of America, for reasons that will be more closely examined later: at the moment, I reserve this little section for the recording of milestones in the apparently forlorn industry of Great Britain.

The first striking English picture I ever saw was:

Jane Shore. (Barker, about 1910).

This was of good quality; a theme purporting to be historical, in which the beautiful but wayward heroine was overtaken by disaster.

Apparently Barkers made another version in 1913, and I cannot obtain particulars of the earlier one.

The first really successful English "super" appears to have been *Comin' Through the Rye* (Hepworth, about 1915); the famous Helen Mathers love story, with Stewart Rome, Alma Taylor and Marguerite Blanche. This created great interest, and was seen by thousands of people. I thought it very enjoyable. A later version does not seem to have been so successful or relatively well photographed.

In 1920, the Hepworth film, *The Kinsman*, was equal to the prevailing American standard, without having any *Open Door* brilliance. The slick polish of the latter production was, however, creditably approached in *Sonia*, the following year; but we must add the reservation that the star and the director of *Sonia* were American.

Nevertheless, 1921 was a great year for the progress of solely British films. Beautiful girls were discovered—notably Constance Worth—who fully equalled the American standard in looks, appeal and ability, and promoted the

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making of the conventional starring picture which yet retained typically English characteristics. From a recent newspaper paragraph, it appears that the British Press are unaware that the films of their country were in several instances given a "Broadway run" in 1921 (whereas this is stated to be a new achievement in 1934). The excellent comedy *The Lunatic at Large* has already been noticed, and another international success of that time was *Carnival*, from the play of stage life in Italy, played by Matheson Lang, Hilda Bayley and Ivor Novello (Alliance Films).

In 1922 came the ambitious *Flames of Passion*, eclipsing all previous British efforts (it was English-made except for having Miss Mae Marsh as the star), and finally in 1923 we had *Love, Life and Laughter*.

Love, Life and Laughter was entirely British throughout, and the nearest possible approach to a masterpiece. To the best of my recollection it is the finest story film England has produced.

Various characteristics of the British art are illustrated in the somewhat arbitrarily-selected examples which follow:—

The Buried City. (1921).

The only African film I have noticed. An impossible adventure story about the discovery of a mysterious white tribe in mid-jungle.

The Education of Nicky. (Harma, 1921).

Chloe—Constance Worth; Nicky—James Knight; Marjorie Villis, Dolores Courtenay and Mary Rorke.

A pleasing story by May Wynne yields a delightful picture, with beautiful photography of Devonshire landscapes. Miss Constance Worth is seen to be a valuable British discovery.

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Fate's Plaything. (Anglo-Hollandia, 1921. B. E. Doxat-Pratt).

A simple and conventional story of a girl's entanglement with a villain, such as is so often turned out in American studios, evokes quite a fresh interest when played no less efficiently in an English manner.

Miss Constance Worth, whose beauty is fully equal to that of the transatlantic favourites, shews the heroine to be altogether human, and as vivacious as may be necessary, but with the slight note of demureness and dignity that suggests the English girl of reality (avoiding the lifeless chilliness that many of them had previously brought to their film characterizations).

I would particularly draw attention to the excellent title.

Flames of Passion. (Graham-Willcox, 1922. Graham Cutts. 9,000 feet).

A brilliantly-produced emotional drama, with Miss Mae Marsh as "Dorothy Forbes", and an all-star English cast including Eva Moore and Hilda Bayley; C. Aubrey Smith and Herbert Langley. There is an inspiring trial scene, in which the Lord Chief Justice is played by Henri Vibart.

After the first night's showing of *Flames of Passion*, the stage of the Oxford Music-hall was destroyed by fire.

Love, Life and Laughter. (Welsh-Pearson, 1923. George Pearson. 6,300 feet).

An absorbing romantic drama concerning a dancing girl's kindly encouragement of an unsuccessful and despondent young author. Beautiful and inspired production, and a wonderful performance by Miss Betty Balfour. Stands out as the greatest of British "supers", if not quite an international masterpiece. The tempo and cutting are really brilliant.

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Very clever moment from *Love, Life and Laughter*:—

Everything is ready in the gaily-decorated little dining-room, and the eagerly-waiting girl, unaware that the author has taken his life, is somewhat anxious at her young friend's lateness for the birthday celebration that she has prepared for him. Trembling with pleasurable excitement, she tears open the note delivered by a messenger.

Some of the candles on the cake have burnt out, and now one of the tinsel streamers becomes detached from the ceiling and falls awry. The room looks darker, and the decorations immediately appear cheap and garish.

La Poupée.

This film, made in 1921, was no doubt vaguely based on Edmond Audran's famous comic opera about a wondrous mechanical doll, and a living girl who "impersonated" it. I remember hearing that the late Thomas le Breton's little daughter Flora, a fine dancer, gave a capital performance as Alesia.

"An excellent British novelty film. Sub-titling and acting especially good."—*Pictures*.

The Sentimental Bloke.

The first Australian film, made in 1920 from the well-known story.

Sonia. (Ideal, 1921. Denison Clift).

Sonia — Evelyn Brent; David O'Rane—Clive Brook;
Lady Danton—Hetta Bartlett; Rev. A. A. Burgess
—Henri Vibart.

Stephen McKenna's society story of war-time conditions, filmed with a brilliance new to England.

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Sweet and Twenty. (Progress, 1920. Sidney Morgan).

Marguerite Blanche and Langhorne Burton in a notable post-war attempt to make pictures of a light and appealing nature, and technically equal to those of other countries. Basil Hood's play makes "a delightful and simple story of British life, showing the power of love and the tortures of jealousy"—*Pictures.*

The heroine, although typically English, was a very attractive and unaffected girl, with the result that, in the language of the Trade, the film should "prove a strong booking anywhere".

Nevertheless, the little studio, at a seaside village in Sussex, seems to have vanished with yesterday's thrice seven forlorn English hopes.

And yet Mr. Claude Friese-Greene's glorious photography in *Crime on the Hill* (B.I.P., 1933); the characteristic and inimitable humour of *Man from Toronto* and *General John Regan*; the Continental brilliance of *The Queen's Affair* and the utter naturalness of *Song of the Plough*—surely these excellent merits, and others, will maintain an international market for British producing companies?

Those Were the Days. (British International, 1934. Thomas Bentley).

Will Hay, with George Graves, Iris Hoey, and other players—every one excellent—in an admirable talking comedy based on Pinero's play "The Magistrate."

Mr. Poskett, the benevolent supendary of a London police court, is induced by his step-son to participate in the city's night life, and has an awkward quarter of an hour when required to adjudicate on a breach of the peace arising in the music hall surreptitiously visited by him.

An extraordinarily effective reconstruction of atmosphere for atmosphere's sake—because it is diverting, and

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not because it is strictly accurate—is obtained by Mr. Bentley, celebrated for the true spirit of his films of Dickens. The old-time music hall scenes should be a valuable record. Whereas an American film would pay exhaustive attention to details of setting and period, without achieving a real, living atmosphere, this picture makes everything live and breathe with utterly convincing naturalness, while disdaining to trouble over trifling inconsistencies and anachronisms.

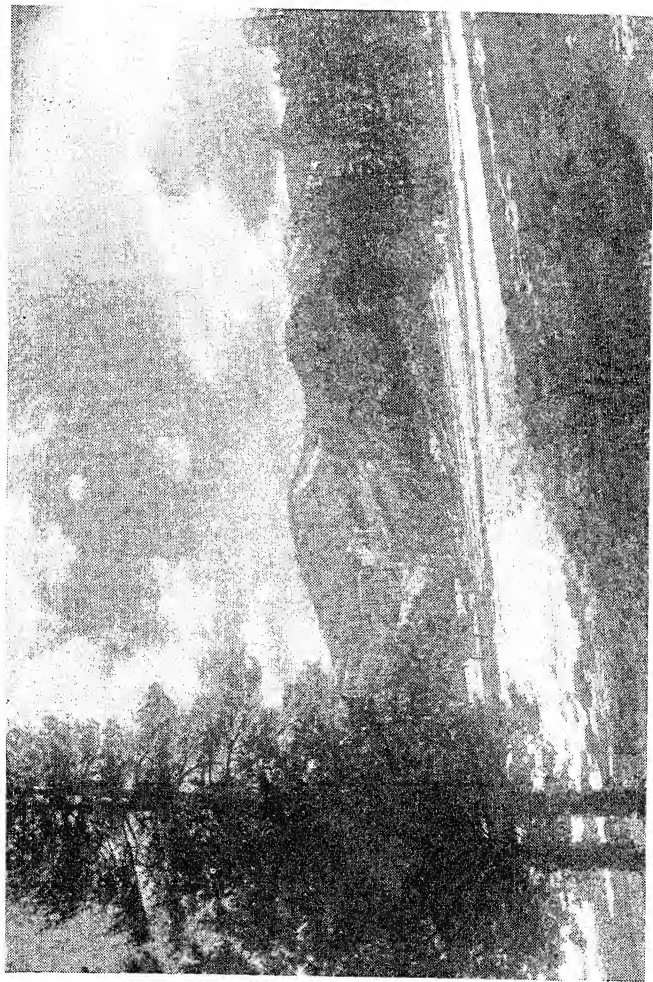
We know, for instance, that the West-End of London is under the jurisdiction of two police courts (and it is rumoured that, having regard to the difference in severity of the sentences which might be expected, comparing these two benches, one side of Rupert Street is busier at night than the other). “Mulberry Street” Police Court seems to be a happy blend of the two institutions in question—Vine Street and Marlborough Street—and it may be a little difficult to envisage this Week-End setting for the very dingy and disreputable music hall depicted (which looks surprisingly like the old Surrey Theatre). Again, music halls with the old-fashioned Chairman of Proceedings must have been very rare at the date in question; and we know for certain that Army officers would not attend them in uniform, as was done by the Indian Army Colonel and the Captain of Guards (George Graves and Claud Allister).

But the settings are all most joyous and refreshing, and each of these apparent inconsistencies is amply justified by the far more important general issue. I would not have one of them altered.

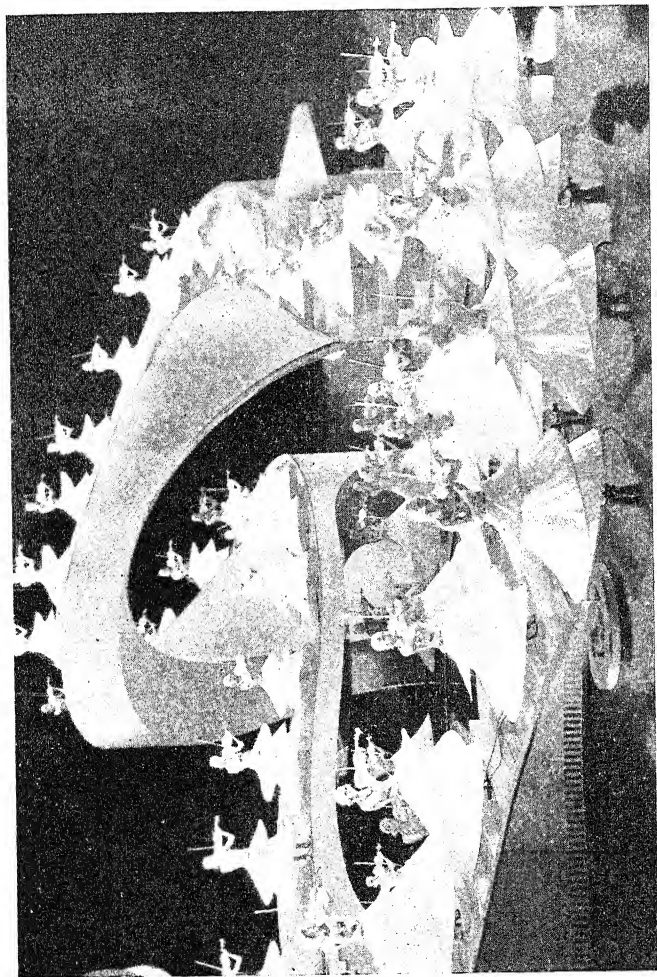
Joy Ride. (Nettlefold, 1935. Harry Hughes).

Gorgeous example of typically British farce humour, with Zelma O’Neal, Gene Gerrard and Irene Vanbrugh.

PICTORIAL BEAUTY



A FINE LANDSCAPE.



DANCE OF THE SINGING VIOLINS.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FILMS

The Scarlet Pimpernel. (London Film, 1935. Alexander Korda).

One of the splendid costume romances by means of which our expert on private lives is doing so much for the industry in England.

Leslie Howard and Merle Oberon.

The Theme Film.

Provided that movement is used for its medium, with occasional static masses for contrast, the screen finds its happiest chances of development as a true art in the expression of the theme rather than the mere story.

The theme picture, therefore, is likely to embody the highest aspect of the film, although it inevitably loses the vote in popular favour. Nevertheless, an appreciable concession to the average taste was shewn in certain pictures lacking in coherent story proper, e.g., *Foolish Wives* (study of a man's villainy); *Dinner at Eight* (M.G.M., 1933. George Cukor) — (the party manners and conventional chatter of dinner guests conceal widely-varying crises in their lives during the past twenty-four hours); *Caligari* and *Intolerance* (already mentioned).

The titles of *Isn't Life Wonderful?* (Griffith) and *Symphony of the Sea* (British Instructional Films) are more or less self-explanatory. In the former, the quoted sentiment emerged from a gloomy setting of extreme poverty in post-war Vienna. *Drifters* was another equally beautiful study of the sea and shipping, made for the same studio by John Grierson.

The Street, a German film by Karl Grune, enabled us to follow, somewhat as in one of Poe's short stories, a man's aimless wanderings during part of a day.

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Grand Hôtel. (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1932. Edmund Goulding).

One of the most brilliant talking pictures yet made, and the first to depict a theme really successfully.

Prima Ballerina—Greta Garbo; Kringelein—Lionel Barrymore; His Chief—Wallace Beery; Hôtel Stenographer—Joan Crawford; Lewis S. Stone and John Barrymore.

Lust, hatred, despair, murder shake the several lives of the great hôtel's guests: each apartment is a separate world of drama and stress. But slight variations of composition cannot alter the immutable whole; the tiny moods of mortals are imperceptible from Olympus. *Tout passe.* The great Hôtel endures in changeless dignity. The huge door revolves slowly with almost unceasing entrance or issue: meticulously conscientious, the reception register takes note of so negligible a triviality as the name of every fresh arrival.

La Nave. (U.C.I., 1922). The theme film from Gabriele d'Annunzio's description of the conception, building and launching of a great ship.

Shipyard. A present-day contribution (1935), admirably made with sound, by Paul Rotha.

Song of the Plough. (Sound City, 1934). Stewart Rome in "a glorious epic of the English countryside"—(Official). Most inspiring.

Nine till Six. (Assoc. Radio Pictures, 1932. Basil Dean).

A fine British theme talkie, with an outstanding performance by Miss Louise Hampton.

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The exclusive Bond Street shop is decidedly expensive, and purchasers are gratified whenever a frock can be obtained for twenty guineas. The staff are pleased when the shutters are put up at six o'clock.

But the proprietress gives thanks on each new day when they can be taken down at nine.

Man of Aran (R. J. Flaherty, 1933) shews us a storm-harried island off the coast of Ireland, and the lonely inhabitants' dismaying fight for existence.

Needless to say, *Man of Aran* is not the right prescription for audiences in whom has been instilled the uncompromising demand for a sex-story with a cast of stars, and even so interesting a film as *Grand Hôtel* failed to satisfy picture-goers in provincial towns.

* * *

Insincerity of Purpose.

Very questionable motives seem to actuate the production of Scripture films in these days, and the unflattering truth about several recent "super masterpieces" of the life of Our Lord is that in general atmosphere they are decidedly inferior to Pathé's *Life of Christ*, made in 1902, before it had occurred to movie money-changers that Bible stories could be made a suitable excuse for sex and glitter, unclothed chorus-girls and empresses bathing in goat's milk.

Those who have been dazed by Cecil B. de Mille's recent *Cleopatra* (for such it is named), or *The Crusades*, will consider themselves fortunate if they are in a position to compare memories of the pre-war Italian films of this kind, e.g., *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Siege of Troy*, *Last Days of Pompeii* and *Quo Vadis*? Antiquity surely does not condone the displacement of faithful chronicle by vulgar buffoonery, and one fails to perceive an adequate reason why history should be butchered to make a Roman Hollywood.

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Vulgarity and Bad Taste.

Cartoon films, in particular, seem to allow themselves a decidedly generous interpretation of the rules of good taste. Recently I saw a cartune, or whatever they are called—one of those singing films illustrating a supposedly popular melody—in which part of the action was set in a cemetery, and the corpses and headstones presently joined in a wild dance, understood to be humorous. Considerable criticism was evoked by *Father Noah's Ark* (United Artists, 1933), a coloured "symphony" which undoubtedly displayed a very free-and-easy treatment of Biblical characters and events, in addition to being frankly vulgar. Detractors doubtless forget, though, that the sole point at issue about a Scripture film is the question whether it makes big money.

It is perhaps safe to say that the majority of cartoons convey the unflattering assumption that a film audience is incapable of resenting vulgarity and ill-breeding. Even the pretty coloured symphony *Lullabyland* (U.A., 1934) displays, at one point, the same cheerful disregard for the ordinary conventions of propriety as was reflected in the Chaplin films, *The Kid* and *The Gold Rush*.

History similarly repeats itself in a singularly offensive impertinence which may not be generally known—the practice of filching portions of news gazettes and inserting them in a story film, without the permission of the persons concerned. In 1920, the English film *A Cigarette Maker's Romance* contained a sub-title: "Lord Fisher calls his friend's attention to the beautiful cigarette maker". It need hardly be said that in the gazette strip which the producers had the audacity to insert, Admiral Fisher was doing nothing of the kind. In the same year, the American picture, *The Marriages of Mayfair*, enlisted Royalty in its cast, with the help of a news shot of the King and Queen of England attending Henley Regatta.

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Now, in 1934, we have *Gallant Lady* (U.A.). As a part of its hackneyed story, the producers have included, in appallingly bad taste, an actual shot of an aeroplane disaster wherein the death of a well-known Italian aviator is depicted.

Dangerous Paths (Berwillia, 1921) contains a chapel scene in which the congregation are shewn dispassionately contemplating wranglings, fisticuffs and finally love-making on the altar steps, as apparently a feature of each normal "performance" (one cannot easily find a better word).

The Diplomaniacs. (Radio, 1933). A vulgar lampoon, offensively deriding the work of the Permanent Court of International Justice. Not clever and not funny, but just an exhibition of the crudest ill-breeding, the sentiment, in the circumstances, coming particularly unfortunately from the United States.

* * *

Very Poor Quality.

The question that is sometimes put to me: "What is the worst film you have ever seen?" is one which, of course, cannot be answered without careful deliberation. But at any rate I can say quite freely that there is one picture which must instantly spring to mind in this connection, to whose formidable candidature I should have to give very attentive and respectful consideration.

The Affairs of Anatol (Paramount, 1921. Cecil B. de Mille. 7,100 feet) was not a cheap or inconsequential film: it was advertised well in advance as a super among supers, with the biggest all-star cast on record—a masterpiece made by a great director. And indeed only an experienced artist, one feels, could have succeeded in reducing Schnitzler's brilliant Viennese atmosphere to so miserable

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a shambles of sex and shallow, commonplace ostentation.

Even the Press of the United States indignantly objected that the picture had been "wholly Americanised in story" (significant enough, I think), and the *Motion Picture Classic*, New York, thus trenchantly delivered itself:—

"We regard this as the worst massacre since Custer's forces were wiped out by the Redskins."

It would be grossly unfair to give the names of the twelve famous victims of this butchery, typical of all that is most vicious in American films.

The most boring film I have ever seen:—

The Bigamist. (George Clark, 1921. Hundreds of reels).

A letter, arriving at breakfast-time, gives the wife reason to suspect that her husband has had a previous affair. The woman's misgivings and stress of mind might be a reasonable subject for a two-reel cameo. Actually this tedious *corvée* dragged its weary length for more than two hours. In a general way, one welcomes so substantial an increase in the yearly figures for British film footage, but really !

The Mutiny. (Hodkinson, 1920).

Supposed to be taken from "The Mutiny of the 'Elsinore'", by the late Jack London, a man who thoroughly knew and loved the sea.

"Distorted quite beyond recognition . . . Every canon of the sea violated, humanly, technically. Awful!"
—Mrs. Jack London.

In other words,

C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la mer.

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Old Spanish Customers. (B.I.P., 1932).

Sir William Gilbert unkindly referred to Wilson Barrett's playing of Shakespeare as "funny, without being vulgar". No such charge could justly be brought against this film.

If studios are so desperately hard-up for intelligent material, I consider they would do well to re-film some worth-while stories from the past. *Hard Cash* and *Foul Play* were infinitely better entertainment as produced by Edison in 1910.

* * *

II. *Topical, Cartoon and Other Films.*

"On another side there is a theatre where only certain pieces are presented, as landscapes, for example, with cascades which can be heard rushing down, or artistic views, which give an optical illusion with the sea in motion."—

Description of Vauxhall in 1786, translated from the diary of Sophie V. la Roche.

There are usually at least two parts in a picture theatre programme, somewhat sharply contrasted, for whereas the story films are fiction, the "topical, interest and shorts" are merely not truth. As in Sophie's time, big towns find it desirable to provide separate theatres for patrons who favour the latter kind of entertainment, which at ordinary cinemas is not welcome in large doses, and moreover, if of an educational nature, is tolerated only on the assurance that "the following is in addition to our ordinary programme". I would here mention in parenthesis that uninformed writers in the lay Press periodically deplore the lack of films especially made for children, a plaint which we may dismiss with the almost obvious explanation that such pictures would seldom be a commercial proposition.

Proceeding, then, first to consider the "animated cartoon", we may suggest that it had its origin in the depicted

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adventures of favourite comic-newspaper characters, of which in England the most famous were "Weary Willie and Tired Tim", drawn by the late Tom Brown, R.I., for *Comic Cuts*, the American counterparts having been, no doubt, the racy Mormon family and Buster Brown, both of the *New York Herald-Tribune*. "Now that Felix the Cat is away, Disney's Mice will play", as Mr. Andrew Buchanan so delightfully puts it¹, and most of us will regret the passing of the greatest of film cartoon characters, and also of Fleischer's little mannikin "Out of the Inkwell". The English children's pets, Pip, Squeak and Wilfred, made a brief screen appearance, but the cartoons of the present day consist chiefly of the "detestable rodents"² Michael and Herminia Mouse, Flip the Frog and Krazy Kat, together with the gloriously-coloured Silly Symphonies and occasional illustrated songs.

The sound-cartoon is revealed at its best in *Melody-land* (United Artists, 1935. Walt Disney), an extremely clever blending of music (*not* words), action and colour, to convey the early conflict and eventual reconciliation between classical and jazz music.

Travel films have existed continuously since 1903, and require no comment. Nature films are a constant feature of, at any rate, the news theatre, and the best I have seen are *The Cuckoo's Secret* (?Ideal, 1921) and *The Four Seasons* (Educational, 1922). *The Cuckoo's Secret* was of great importance to naturalists, as it solved, for the first time, certain mysteries regarding the habits of that unscrupulous bird.

The origin of the topical or news film is necessarily bound up with the beginnings of cinematography itself—Fred Ott's giant sneeze; "Shoeing a Horse"; walkers in Hyde Park and workmen leaving a factory in Lyons. For many years, it is superfluous to say, the famous Gazette Pathé, the Gaumont Graphic and their equivalents and

¹ "Films", p. 200.

² A correspondent in "Film Weekly".

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successors, have been a regular feature of picture show entertainment. To a certain extent they form a valuable historical record. Admittedly the talking news reel is not a true chronicle of events (the super-printed sound accompaniment being generally quite fictitious), and it can be made to present so debatable a version that consideration is being given to the desirability of making it censorable.

Nevertheless, it is convenient for those who wish to know what styles were worn several years ago, or what won the Grand Prix in 1923, to be put to no greater trouble than entering a little rural cinema in Littlehampton or Scobston Center, Iowa. It is a boon, to those who may have missed a chance paragraph in the newspaper, to be assured by careful repetition in twenty-two successive gazettes in September and October, 1934, that the Cameron Highlanders have definitely taken over guard duties in London. At the present time the topical reel tends to cover every phase of the news items disseminated by journalism and the wireless telephone, except possibly the fat stock prices and those mysterious sections darkly hinting that "eggs opened quietly at 8-8.30, and cheese was somewhat steadier. Money appeared to be in brisk demand".

Most engaging of talkie gazette reporters:—

R. E. Jeffrey—Universal Talking News. (silly ass!).

Great resourcefulness and courage are required by news cameramen, and the most commendable despatch is shewn by all concerned in the publication of the topical reel. The Derby of 1922 was on view in Aberdeen at 10 p.m. on the day of the race, and London cinema "audiences" saw the opening stages of the Princess Mary's wedding before the ceremony was completed.

Nauseous profiteering is manifest in the fees demanded of Gazette companies for the right to film popular events, and the aforementioned pluck and ingenuity can hardly be better exemplified than in the matter of the huge Dempsey-Carpentier world's boxing

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championship, fought in America. On this occasion a cameraman secreted himself beforehand, with his apparatus, in a large tub within the grounds. He performed remained in his uncomfortable quarters over-night, and then filmed the great contest through a hole in the side of the tub. The resulting news reel by the Diogenes Film Company (if that was their name) was nearly as effective as the official version, for which an exorbitant royalty had been charged. Why pay more?

An early fault in Topical Budgets was the absurdly high speed at which they were projected, resulting in an irreverent galloping of funeral processions, and a dangerous velocity in the launching of new vessels. A more frequent objection, nowadays, is the slightly haphazard sequence of different items.

An unfortunate impression, for instance, may easily be conveyed by a scene of a big financiers' dinner, immediately followed by a view of convicts at play in a well-known penitentiary; or by a "shot" of the Parliament Buildings, Ottawa, slickly replaced by a large cage of cockatoos from the Buda-Pesth Zoo.

I mean to say, it is careless, and sometimes recalls to my mind a portion of a well-meant placard from a provincial newspaper:—

Amazing Robbery in Broad Daylight
Full Account of Christ Church Bazaar

12. Excellent Screen Material which Awaits Filming.

How pitiful to see the characters apparently struggling hard to give interest to the utterly un-cinematic material of many a filmed dialogue play; how unenviable the cameraman's forlorn task, as he photographs them, first from this side and then from that, desperately striving to convey movement and screen life to two people who are merely talking, talking, talking!

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It would seem foolhardy to suggest that any virgin soil can remain undiscovered—and yet . . .

Without wandering through the whole realm of literature and stage plays, let us consider, quite at random, merely one or two of the stories whose excellent film possibilities occur to us as having been overlooked.

* * *

Drama.

1. Leaden-footed.

An old man on muleback is passing through the Arizona desert. He is known to have money in his pack, and on his arrival in a rocky defile is brutally murdered and robbed. To all appearances he had been killed by the chance displacement of an enormous boulder, but the actual crime has been revealed, through the desert mirage, to three travellers twelve miles away. In the circumstances, the task of bringing the murderer to book is difficult and exciting.

With acknowledgements to Amalgamated Press, London, from whom copyright must be sought.

A powerful drama or short Western, with scope for fine photography. Suitable for Universal, Radio or Columbia.

* * *

2. Alleged Incidents from the Life of Cagliostro.

The Queen's Necklace has been adequately filmed, but much of the romantic and powerfully dramatic Cagliostro-lore remains untouched by the cinema. See the strong story by Rafael Sabatini in Maclean's Magazine.

Free of copyright. Suitable for Warner or Twentieth Century. Suitable for a British studio, if they would spend the money to do it properly.*

* I am more than interested to learn that Gaumont-British are proposing to film this story, which, they say, "abounds in drama, and is excellently suited to picturization."

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Farce.

1. *The Identity Exchange.* (R. Andom).

A magic medicine confers the power of instantly changing identity with someone else, unknown. The resource is all very well to save the young man from a ticklish situation, but needless to say the new and unexplored life starts at the most awkward possible phase (for instance, a judge of the High Court, about to deliver judgment on a complicated case; an actor called for his cue as Romeo, etc.).

Present copyright position would willingly be investigated by the writer.

An absurd farce, full of action and good character parts, suitable for a talking picture.

* * *

2. *The Rift in the Loot.*

Wonderful old Hampstead Castle has a legend that treasure is buried in its secret passages, but this does not help the penniless old Earl to stave off his creditors. "Why not let the place for a few months?", thinks his pretty daughter. A servantless castle would not look well, and so the disguised family pass into the remunerative temporary employ of the self-made millionaire tenant.

The official announcement that the Hampsteads have gone abroad is misleading to Herbert and Horace. They are professional removers by road or rail (but preferably by night), and have recently come into some valuable property, which they think it would be better to hide in the supposedly deserted castle, rather than to display openly (for they have little faith in police protection).

Meanwhile, the unscrupulous sausage king is conducting a midnight search for the legendary doubloons. He eventually finds treasure of sorts, but according to the

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police, who interferingly butt in, it is of suspiciously recent vintage.

George C. Foster's amusing play seems to have excellent film possibilities of romance, excitement and humour, and special scope for a comedy pair of burglars.*

Serial.

"The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings" (L. T. Meade and Clifford Eustace).

I marvel that in the welter of hectic serials, this exciting scientific episode-romance seems to have been neglected. It has thrills enough and to spare, and concerns an Englishman's efforts to stamp out a nefarious secret society.

Copyright enquiries to Messrs. George Newnes, Ltd., London.

* Since this was written, the film "Birds of a Feather" has been made by John Baxter for Universal-British, with George Robey as the sausage king.

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EXPLOITATION AND PRESENTATION.

1. *Publicity for Films and Players.*

As will be recalled from a previous remark, one of the first steps in the "boosting" of a star is to select a suitable name, either short and simple or long and pretentious, according to fancy. Many players are content with two syllables, while others have compendious descriptions reminding us of one of those members of the Spanish nobility who, on registering at a French hotel, has to explain that "no reference to more than one living person is intended", and that one small bedroom will hold all of him. A single name was adopted by Nazimova, Cheseboro and Doralina, and the similar practice obtaining in opera and on the French stage was continued when some of their stars entered films (where, on the other hand, Farrar was known as Geraldine Farrar).

Complicated or highbrow names must be avoided, as the golden rule is to assume that in film-making we are catering for the lowest grade of intelligence (from which category, however, readers of this book are deemed to be excluded). Therefore the directors von Stroheim and Sjöström must be called "van Strome" and "Victor Seastrom"; Willy Eichberger is "Carl Esmond" outside Germany, and Derelys Perdue was urged by many misprintings to change her christian name to Ann. Signe Auen, a Danish girl, infuriated because the assistant director used to shout out "Here, you! Singy!!", vowed that thenceforward her name would be spelt "Seena Owen" for the benefit of Californians and children. The concession will not be necessary in these pages, grateful though we are for the offer.

Hopeless confusion has resulted from the duplication of the names William Boyd and Kay Hammond (four present-day players), and odd designations include Henry Gsell,

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Allan d'Wan, Rubye, Carole, Nancye, Leatrice, Queren-tia, Verree, Pert, Velvet and Boots.

The quaint camaraderie that is America's own has been reflected in the names Snub Pollard, Skeets Gallagher, Schnozzle Durante, Ginger Rogers and Slim Summerville; although there have been occasional attempts at equally marked dignity, as when the First National Company announced "*Miss Dorothy Gish in Fury*". If this influence should extend to the English stage, we shall read that "*The Windmill Man*" includes Albertram Coote, Esq., as the demented horticulturist.

Whether easy or difficult, the names are delightfully misprinted, not only by the lay Press, but in the notices of film exhibitors. As late as September last, one of these worthies, doubtless with memories of *Ben Hur*, advertised the star as "Roman Novarro", and I have also seen "Carlo Dempsey in *The Love of Flower*";* Owing to carelessness in revising a shorthand-typist's draft, the cast of a recent film was advertised as including "Mad Jevons". "Caramel Myers" is almost as bad as "Macaroni wireless", but perhaps the gem amongst my recollections is "Norman Talmadge in *The Voice from the Minuet*". On the part of daily newspapers, of course, such errors are more excusable, and a bright paragraph writer, having heard that Miss Ruth Hall is a great-niece of the famous Vicente Blasco Ibañez, will think nothing of inserting a chatty reference to "Mr. Vincent Belasco Hall-Bannister, nephew of David Belasco".

A suitable name having been selected in each case, the would-be stars must take every other possible step to bring themselves before the public notice. Their own unaided efforts amount to comparatively little, consisting chiefly of rather naive self-advertisement, despite the alluring tolerance, in America, of what might elsewhere be considered

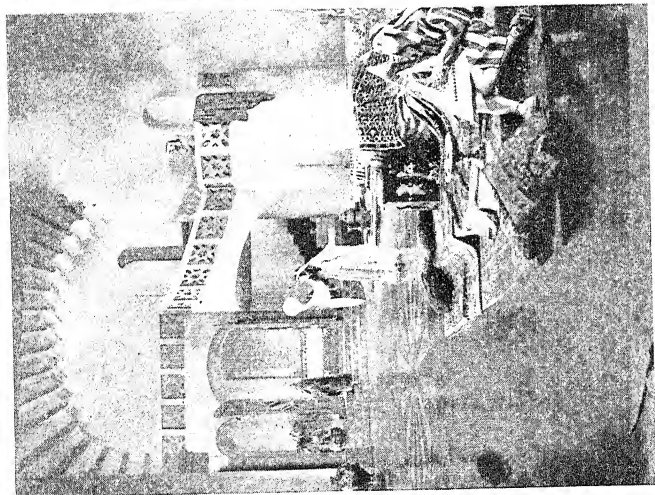
* Carol Dempster in "*The Love Flower*".

SETTINGS



1903—"THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY."

SETTINGS



1924—"BEN-HUR."

PL. XXVI.



HORRIBLE REALISM.

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ill-bred ostentation. When, for instance, the two stars of the film *Barbara Frietchie*, at the New York opening in 1925, arrived at the theatre in an old-fashioned calèche, and dressed in the costumes of the period, the gesture was held to be quite acceptable. Then there is the good old "gag", amongst film artists, that they were so wonderfully transformed in their part that even their friends and the gateman failed to recognise them. If this has been tried once, it has bored listeners two hundred times.

No: they may thank their lucky stardoms that the methods of the Press and publicity agents are far more scientific. I have mentioned the extraordinary campaign on behalf of Miss "Theda Bara", advertised as an Egyptian girl of noble birth, who must never appear in public with her face unveiled. I have seen a propaganda portrait of her sitting cross-legged on a skeleton. The greater the cash value of the star, the more wildly enthusiastic are the publicity efforts to uphold the dignity of her art by arranging for her to inaugurate Shopping Weeks and judge at baby- and other fat-stock shows; and the more glowing are the incessant references to her in the Press. "Shot aimed at Chinese hits near actress", ran a typical newspaper heading in March, 1923, upon which a spiteful contemporary remarked: "The near actress in question was P—— D——".

Sometimes the accounts are conflicting, but in no case do they lack imagination. Two rival versions are now current regarding Miss J—— C——. The one states that she was born in 1904, and is the daughter of an influential theatre manager; the other has it that she dates from 1908, was brought up in very poor circumstances, and earned a bare existence for her family by dancing. On calling at the Gaumont British studios, I was informed that Miss Victoria Hopper was only sixteen years of age—evidently a forty per cent. remission for good conduct. The lady herself is not in the least ashamed of being twenty-five.

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On the other hand, little Miss Ida Lupino was genuinely under seventeen on her departure for Hollywood, and when it was quite truthfully announced in July, 1934, that she was suffering from infantile paralysis, many players of more classic vintage could have kicked themselves for not having thought of it. "Every little girl can teach you something new."

There are many competitions with prizes for the most convincing impersonation of a famous star. At a circus where an award was to be given for the best Charlie Chaplin walk, the required standard was so high that Mr. Chaplin himself, whimsically deciding to compete incognito, was placed twentieth in order of merit.

Doing good by stealth is no part of film exploitation, and little serious effort was made in the direction of hushing up Jackie Coogan's trip to Athens to deliver the Mercy Cargo of a million dollars' worth of foodstuffs.

On the whole, the gentle reader must seek elsewhere for anecdotes—either published or true—regarding individual players, but I have pleasure in quoting a few which will serve as specimens. Miss Lois Wilson, we are informed, has never consented to undress in a film (and others, we gather, object to putting on clothes). Japanese stars will not kiss; Constance Bennett cannot cry; Kay Francis cannot scream (and hundreds of others can't act?). Miss Colleen Moore has one eye blue and the other brown. A certain male player is "double-voiced", and I understand is looking for two partners to form a quartette.

Baby Peggy was described as "the jitney Juliet", and Mae Murray as "the girl with the bee-stung lips". Miss Lyda Roberti was advertised as "the willowy sex-menace", but according to the latest press-sheet sent to me, she is now "a lone wolf".

This presents as intriguing a choice of alternatives as is suggested by the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer note-paper. At the bottom of the sheet is printed "Your takings soar with

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Leo's roar ", whereas at the head the Leo in question bears the motto " *Ars Gratia Artis* ".

We now come to the methods used for exploiting the films themselves, of which the most audacious was surely the hoax played by the Universal Company on the British War Office, whereby the latter were induced to despatch a party of soldiers to escort *The Phantom of the Opera* on its arrival at Southampton. The more ambitious propaganda schemes, as will be readily understood, are sponsored by the producing companies, who do everything possible to interest the public and assist the exhibitor.

I am sometimes asked why, in that case, the public can not be allowed to visit the studios, and see films in the making. No doubt an inhospitable impression is given by the invariable practice of guarding the studios like prisons, but it should be realised that the huge movie personnel cannot all be known by sight, and it might be difficult to detect an unauthorised intruder whose enthusiasm prompted him to wander about on the sets. Thus it could easily happen that some thoroughly ignorant " fan ", without the least capacity to act or even speak properly, ventured to wedge in and take an important part in one of the films. It might be months and months before the mistake was discovered. Again, we recall the distressing incident when an escaped inmate from a Southern California institution for the feeble-minded was traced to a studio, and 157 members of the technical staff and players were detained for interview.

Posters and display sheets are provided by the producing or distributing company, and it devolves upon the exhibitor to do the rest, and make his own local publicity with or without the aid of the stock catch-phrases suggested by the studio publicity department. " Without ", for preference, I should say. In the case of the filming of the famous

Satevepost story, "Humoresque" (Fannie Hurst)*, an official suggestion was "The picture that makes the dimples to catch the tears."

If, despite this, a film is good, it's luck!

Very clever and subtle was a caption advertising *The Kid from Spain*, but it would require half a page of explanation to make it intelligible to English readers—

"The Kid was from Spain . . . but the bull was from Missouri!"

An irritating and puzzling habit of exhibitors is the practice of prematurely taking down the posters by which their programme is announced in the neighbourhood. By Friday afternoon the notices will all have been changed to shew the programme for the coming week, whereas the week-end is precisely the period when the public feel in the mood for visiting a cinema, and would like to know what attractions the various houses offer.

Rich and rare have been some of the displays to advertise a film—blindfold sandwich-men for *Blind Husbands*; nine-foot policemen for *Jack's the Boy*; an exhibitor's offer to engaged couples, that during the run of *Please Get Married* a free wedding would be provided on his stage. As part of the exploitation of *Safety Last* an acrobat, known as the Human Fly, was engaged to climb the side of a high building, but lost his footing and was killed instantly.

Some of the publicity methods are, of course, definitely objectionable, such as the practice of purposely misrepresenting a film duly passed by Censor, by giving an insincere "warning" that it is of doubtful morals; and that of making capital of the fact that a film has received only a limited certificate. On the shewing of *Gold-Diggers of 1933*, some theatres displayed life-size cardboard models of almost naked girls, thus conveying an entirely unwarranted impression of the film. *The Birth of a Nation* was based on Thomas Dixon's "The Clansman", and gave rise to a

* Cosmopolitan, 1921. Frank Borzage. All-star cast, including Alma Rubens and Gaston Glass.

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certain amount of controversy on racial questions. The film's opening date in New York coincided with the holding of protest meetings and even street rioting, which there is strong reason for suspecting were deliberately engineered for commercial ends.

* * *

11. *The Public and the Cinema Press.*

"Kellum's Talking Pictures seem to us . . . of no practical use except in close-ups, in which the character necessarily has to mouth his or her words carefully. We see no future for the 'talkies' in the field of the photoplay, particularly as we believe that the film play owes its tremendous success to the fact that the observer uses his own imagination to clothe the scenes with words. The talkie, even if successful, would be but a pale imitation of the stage."

Motion Picture Classic, August, 1921.

. . . Absolutely true, every word of it; and yet how often do we read that kind of thing now? So much for the alleged power of the Press, and its influence over public thought.

Actually, in kine-matters the public are particularly indifferent to the opinion of the newspaper, and I must admit that several of us have been somewhat careless and inaccurate in our writings. The principal error of film journalists seems to be an unduly short memory, particularly when they are led into the fatal trap of recording someone's "first appearance". Miss Margaret Bannerman, for instance, was a leading lady in films of 1919, and so were Miss Tallulah Bankhead and Miss Ruth Chatterton, but the Press have announced that they started screen work in about 1930. A paragraph which appeared some five years ago: "Tallulah to make a Film", was as amusing as another example in a London evening paper.

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This latter was headed "Dance Band Instruments for Military Band", and described the interesting venture of a regiment which had decided to make the experiment of marching to the music of saxophones! I always chuckle when I recollect this novel discovery.

The beginning of film journalism seems to have been the appearance, in November, 1889, of an article in the *Optical Magic Lantern Journal* describing Friese-Greene's remarkable invention, and its anticipated extension to talking pictures. Then Stuart Blackton started the *Motion Picture Magazine*, the first in America. Unless I am mistaken, it was founded in 1899, and closely followed by *Photoplay*; a very enterprising feat, considering that movie theatres were not yet in existence.

The day of quaint and cumbrous titles is long past. The "Automotor and Horseless Vehicle Journal" is now called simply "The Auto", and no one dreams of asking for a copy of "Answers to Correspondents". So the *Optical Magic Lantern Journal*, as such, has long ceased to exist, but the *Kinematograph Weekly*, rapidly approaching its fiftieth year of descent therefrom, via *The Biograph*, is one of the most reliable and authoritative film papers in the world, in addition to being the oldest. The same publishers produced, in 1911, *Pictures*, an interesting film magazine for the general public, costing 1d. per week, I believe. The London publications were far behind the American (*Motion Picture Classic*, *Photoplay*, *Screenland*, etc.) in the quality of their illustrations, until, in 1921, a monthly edition was produced in photogravure, under the title of *The Picturegoer*.

To *Pictures* and *The Picturegoer* I owe a considerable debt of acknowledgement for their helpful co-operation during my stay in London; and in many instances where my own opinion coincides, I have availed myself of the convenience of quoting their neat and forceful summing-up of a film.

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Humour from *Pictures*, March, 1923.

"Our March Movie calendar:—

19th. Swedish Bio release first comedy—1999.

23rd. First American picture of British life—
2053."

Humour from America:—

"*Peer Gynt*. Ibbie's Scandinavian Rose"—
Screenland.

"In a comedy studio, cleanliness is not next to godliness: it is next to impossible"—*Picture-Play*.

"*The Queen of Sheba*—The architecture is varied and extensive, the Babylonian and Hollywood styles predominating"—*Motion Picture Classic*.

* * *

The complacent stolidity of the public and the ruthless commercialism of the industry make it impossible to write about films without being cynical. We know that what we write will have no effect whatever, remembering that every genuine film critic has, for instance, resisted the invasion of talking pictures, but altogether vainly.

It would be quite a mistake to suppose that the American Press are incapable of finding fault with the national pictures: on the contrary, they are often most uncompromising, and bitterness of heart will bring forth a criticism like this:—"Just another what is the long list of what's wrong with the movies."

The most terse and scathing of all film criticisms I have ever read—I would rather have written this line than have taken Quebec—concerns the dastardly mutilation of *Anatol*:—

"Schnitzler? He wrote the title"—*Screenland*.

After sitting through scores of machine-made society-sex dramas; after dozens of Westerns with the same old set shewing the bank, the grocery store and the saloon bar

plainly recognisable in each, the jaded reviewer becomes weary at last, and maybe he makes his report something like this—

“ Just a motion picture.”

After all, contrast is everything. There is perhaps no deeper silence in Nature than that which endures for $1\frac{1}{2}$ seconds after a small child has fallen flat on the pavement : music seems all the sweeter after we have listened to Earl Kellington's band. And this entire absence of adjectives can be effective enough in its way. Perhaps I may be allowed to recall an earlier incident where comparative silence was more eloquent than words. Although I personally was on the Continent at the time, I can vouch for the truth of, at any rate, the gist of the story.

In Plymouth, Devonshire, in about the year 1902, one of the grocer's shops had a particularly extensive window-display of eggs. They were of all prices and qualities, each grade being separately basketed and neatly labelled. I am hardly *au fait* with the trade descriptions of eggs, and the prices, also, I can only suggest at random, but we will say the captions read something like this :—

2/6d. per dozen. Finest silk-screened, hand-picked best.

2/- per dozen. A thoroughly reliable egg.

1/9 per dozen. Warranted quiet to boil or fry.

1/6 per dozen. Strong and serviceable kitchen boilers.

As now eaten.

1/2 per dozen. This season's goods. Very effective.
(and so on)

Finally, after wandering down the long gamut of prices and emotions, the spectator came to a basket at $5\frac{1}{2}$ d. per dozen.

These were modestly labelled :

EGGS.

iii. *Domestic Self-satisfaction.*

Are not Ab-Warna and Fa-Para, flickers of Dammass-acre, better than all the waters of Esteel?

* * *

With the sane and well-informed judgments envisaged in the preceding chapter, we now have to contrast a far less satisfactory aspect of journalism—the bombastic and untruthful suggestions that American films are unapproachable in quality elsewhere.

Hollywood itself, I readily agree, is a place of ignorance, mediocrity and ill-breeding, but it would be a grave mistake to suppose, as many have done, that these failings are representative of America in general. It is natural and commendable that a country should be proud of her own offspring and institutions, and in the musical comedy “Tell Me More”, we good-humouredly receive the news that the comedian’s birth was thus notified to an expectant world:—

“Mr. and Mrs. Sipkin have the honour
to announce

Monty, the perfect child.”

It is frank, and it reminds us of many other proud claims made in good faith by Americans. Englishmen, for that matter, are insular enough, and I have never met one who, when asked the date of the outbreak of the War, failed to reply that it was the 4th August, 1914.

But a film criticism worded: “Made in Europe, and looks like it”^{*} suggests Hollywood, and Hollywood only.

This cheery piece of impudence is contained in *One Night of Love* (Columbia, 1934. Victor L. Schertzinger):—

The girl’s glorious voice has wondrously responded to conscientious tuition and hard work, and her European tour is a succession of triumphs. Florence, Berlin, Vienna, Paris . . . la Scala, Covent Garden . . .

^{*} A Californian magazine, August, 1924.

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With a few more months of her maestro's unique training, she will *almost be good enough for the Metropolitan*.

It may be news (for it appears to be at variance with the popular conception) to know that actually our film technique in the States is of very indifferent quality, the art of make-up, for instance, being particularly ill-developed, and even the mechanical principles of cinema being lamentably ill-learned—to say nothing of the miserably poor art level, which is common knowledge.

When Gibson Gowland remarked to me that he had taken his little boy for a holiday to Venice, I fell into the absurd blunder of absent-mindedly confusing the town (for it may be remembered that a certain amount of spurious notoriety has been gained by another place bearing the same name, but in Italy). In America, if we refer to Athens, Geneva or Syracuse, we mean the real place, and in America, when Mr. Ben B. Hampton writes a "History of the Movies", he means a history of American films.

It is a mystery to me, though, that other countries should be obsessed by the idea that all good films are American. I am glad to find the *Encyclopædia Britannica* is not intolerantly and rigidly English in outlook. It is broad-minded enough to obtain from a museum in Chicago its information on "Indian Paintings of the Rajput School", but its almost exclusively American article on the cinema is surely a little too broad-minded, when the name of Friese-Greene is not even mentioned, and no English, French or Swedish film obtains representation in the extensive collection of photographs.

Mr. J. Stuart Blackton's interesting historical film, *Cavalcade of the Movies*, is similarly free from the risk of distressing us with too fulsome mention of the country of his origin. We may be irritated at a repetition of the common blunder that the cinematograph was invented by Edison, but we are refreshed by the hitherto unpublished information that the Zoetrope was invented by a lady of Ancient Greece, named Zoe.

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iv. *Film Presentation Examined.*

*But fiercer raged the fighting
Around Valerius dead,
For Titus dragged him by the foot
And Aulus by the head.*

The film having been made, more or less on the principles roughly outlined in previous chapters, there remains the matter of its disposal. It will already have been heralded by the publicity staff, some of whom actually go to the trouble of viewing parts of the picture in the studio projection room, and now it is necessary to shew a completed copy to prospective purchasers (unless these worthies have been induced to contract for so many subjects in advance, good or bad*).

As every big scene is photographed by more than one camera, there will perhaps be several negatives available. From the finest of these, a trade show positive is carefully printed for exhibition to the trade after it has been submitted to the censorship authorities of the country, the potential hirers being perhaps under the impression that a similarly perfect copy will later be available for cinemas.

Bookings are decided by the children of exhibitors, who, accompanied when necessary by their nurses, mothers and aunts, attend the "pre-view". The Press, also, are admitted when space permits, but are likely to feel somewhat out of place unless they are fond of children. In the early days, Trade Shows were witnessed by grown-ups, and coffee and cigars were provided.

The Trade journals are obliged to send a representative, but other reporters who have not attended may obtain a "Press synopsis"—a printed folder containing a collection of adjectives and some illustrations. This booklet includes at least one item that may be of historic interest in later years, namely, the original footage of the film. Long, long

* Illegal under the Act of 1927, but . . .

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afterwards, when we pass a cinema and notice the programme advertising two big features and

“also Gazette, comedy, Wonderful Wales and Dr. Mabuse”

we realise that the original masterpiece must have had twenty-three thousand feet of clay. Some of the daily newspapers will now give a description of the film, and insert some photographs, and if the release date is mentioned, the public can make a note of the film in their diaries (supposing they have diaries with a three-year capacity). Meanwhile, the picture goes into cold storage.

In the fulness of time, the renters, after trimming the positives down to a handy length, will release them for exhibition to movie audiences, and in the interim will have arranged a “special run” on Broadway or in the West End of London for any picture of unusual importance, after which it is put away again for about six months. I frequently hear complaints that films, on release to the general public, are never in even the same state of completeness as during their “pre-release”, to which it is apparently retorted that the first-run picturegoer paid two dollars (or say 8/6d.), whereas in the suburbs a programme, in a sense fuller, is shewn for a fifth of the price. If the public deem this an imposition, they should certainly take effective steps to express their dissatisfaction. Again, the renters apparently hold the view that if exciting scenes are shewn in the “stills” displayed outside the theatre, there is no occasion for duplicating things by retaining these same scenes in the film itself—a policy which causes further grumbling from patrons.

Just as in the United States it is illegal to misrepresent an old re-issue as a new film, in England some local authorities forbid the exhibition of posters depicting scenes which are not actually on view in the film as shewn.

Considerably later than night, as I have indicated, the positive goes for either three or six days to the small-town

exhibitor, whose patrons will not always notice that the frocks are out-of-date and the topical allusions are no longer topical. Nowadays the renters' remuneration will take the form of a percentage of the receipts. It must be realized that I represent the Press and Dramatic Art, and do not necessarily know every secret of the movie distributing trade, but I understand that the percentage figure is more favourable when two pictures are hired together from one organization. This would account for our so often seeing two *Starry Heights* or two *Grunting Lion* productions in the same programme—and, only too often, with practically the same cast. In *Great Train Robbery* days there would be a standard rental of \$15, but the fee soon rose to \$100, and in 1911 the Barker Company charged £50 for one week's hire of *Henry VIII*.

Again, some of us can remember when the programme used to consist of six one-reelers, growing, by about 1911, to a series of three-reelers lasting up to an hour and three-quarters. We still have one-reel stories, but they now take nine reels, and the present-day "audience" (or whatever the word is) expect 2½ to 3 hours' varied entertainment.

Thus the exhibitor's first task, when the ugly zinc tins arrive on Monday or Thursday morning, is to unspool the reels in the winding-room and prune them down to a length suitable for his programme. Here discretion tells: it will sometimes be better to cut out the beginning and end of two consecutive scenes, rather than, by removing the whole of another, to give colour to one of those stupid complaints that there has been tampering with the film. If it transpires that an unnecessary number of frames has been removed, why, bless me! they can always be joined up somewhere else after the first experimental performance. Indeed, it is a point of honour that the redundant strips must be somewhere inserted again before the print goes back to the renters.

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An amusing *canard* tells of a positive which had passed through the hands of several exhibitors, and by an extraordinary coincidence, when the last had finished piecing it together again for return, the copy was exactly the same as when first issued! *Ben trovato*, of course, but laughably unfeasible in practice.

It will be gathered, though, that as far as possible and reasonable, the film is untouched by hand from factory to wearer, thus preserving the force and value of every carefully-balanced annotation of the director in the studio.

It was formerly held that the public went to the cinema to see films, and the wise exhibitor, when arranging his programme, will bear in mind that this quaint convention dies hard. It is true that spectators do not care for the inclusion of too many films, which can be appropriately seen in music-halls, restaurants, and wax-works; but even at the present time, at least forty or fifty per cent. of the entertainment should be thus composed. The remainder may be "stage turns", vaguely so described—jugglers, performing pigeons, comic singers, tap dancers and purveyors of obscene cross-talk—or there may be a beauty, hairdressing or fashion competition open to members of the audience.

The most intolerable item, in my opinion, is the apparently inevitable selection on a damned electric hurdy-gurdy known as a cinema organ, an instrument with a characteristic moaning tone too depressing to be described.

With to-day's exacting audience, there is no time to be lost in presenting the various parts of the long programme, and to avoid a second's delay in working, the sequences will be joined together, not as complete films, but as thousand-foot reels, however composed. To ensure that No. 2 Projector is ready to cut in at the instant when No. 1 is due to be thrown out of circuit, the projectionist usually requires a warning signal. It is possible to manage with a blue paint-mark on the edge of the film-strip, about a

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hundred feet from the end of the reel, but a more popular method is to make a series of big crosses on the images by scraping with a sharp knife. If these flashes are arranged for at least five frames at a time, and repeated like an intermittent alarm clock warning, the operator cannot fail to perceive their message if he occasionally looks through his little window. Moreover, the diversion will be appreciated by the audience, as it goes a long way towards relieving the tedium of a solemn funeral scene, or "bucking up" an unduly tender love passage.

Most cinemas are now provided with illuminated clocks, and a spectator will be well advised, before entering the theatre, to consult the time-table displayed in the vestibule, to which the management adhere as closely as possible. Otherwise, when one enters in the middle of a picture, it is quite impossible to tell, even after careful and prolonged scrutiny, whether it is the Life of Abraham or *Whoopee*. Formerly it was the practice, either to display a slide announcing "The next picture will be —", or to shew an illuminated "turn-number", *qua* music-hall, corresponding with a little programme which the spectator was induced to purchase on entering. Neither of these expedients is practicable to-day, and I can sympathise with the predicament in which a Londoner found himself, at the beginning of last year.

It seems that he particularly wished to see the film *An Angel Gone West*, which had been highly recommended as being extremely vulgar. What was his annoyance on entering the C—— cinema, to find that he was evidently late for the performance, and moreover that the advertised attraction was on the contrary a wishy-washy, pious affair, depicting a host of white-robed nuns in prayer¹. Supposing that his leg had been badly pulled, he walked out in disgust. If only someone could have apprised him that the public performance had been preceded by the Trade Show of Martinez Sierra's beautiful *Cradle Song*!

In another direction, also, there is vast room for improvement, and that is in the announcing of the cast of a picture. Rightly or wrongly, the public are extremely interested in knowing the names of the artists, and under the present vicious star system it is imperative for the Press to know them. It ought not to be necessary to the enjoyment of a film, I must admit, but as the studios have whetted this appetite, it is curious that they do not better satisfy it. In only one picture can I remember a reasonable and convenient method of revealing the players' names, and that was in Goldfish-Selwyn's *The North Wind's Malice*.

Whenever and however a cast is given, it is not particularly conducive to realism or romance, but it is surely obvious that a spectator cannot be expected to memorize a long list of players, shewn for a few seconds at the beginning of a film—before he has become familiar with a single one of the characters. AT THE END of *The North Wind's Malice* a caption stated "Now that you have shared their joys and their sorrows, allow us to present . . ." and then the various players were marshalled, two at a time, and clearly labelled. Many a picturegoer, nowadays, will wait for the film to start again, in the hope that a second sight of the cast-title will supply the name he wants. He then immediately walks out.

As this practice is extremely inconvenient to the theatre as a whole (being equivalent to the exasperating habit of waiting until a 'bus has started, before ringing the bell to stop it), would not the exhibitor's slight extra trouble be amply repaid if he posted up a cast list somewhere in the entrance lobby?

* * *

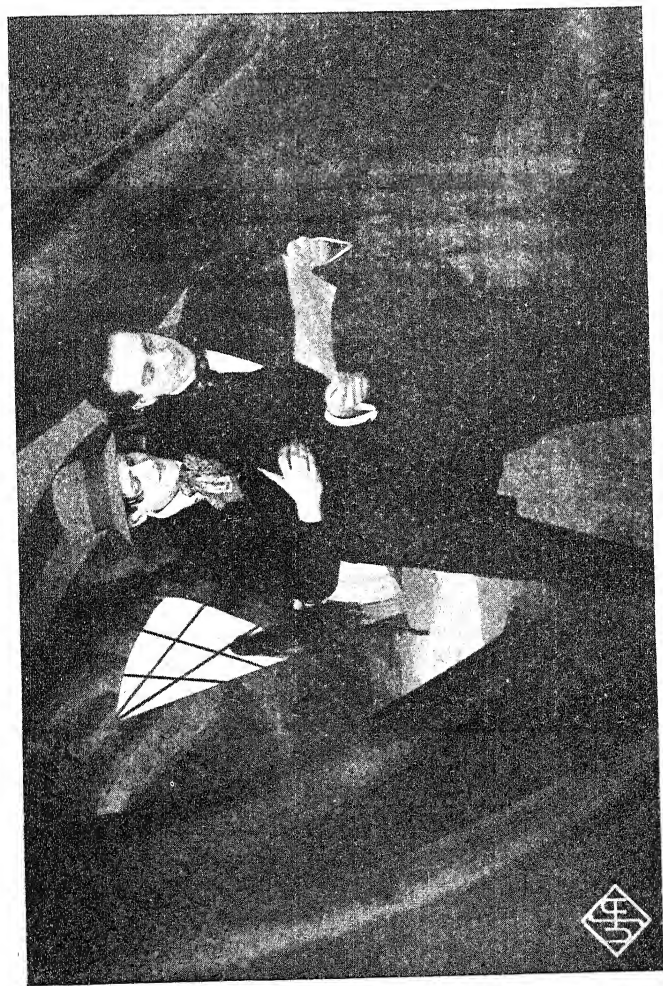
v. *Censorship.*

No manager in his senses would have dreamed of bringing an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" company into "Masonic-Dixie land",* and in the presence of friends from the

* Territory south of the Mason-Dixon line.



“ THE MIRACLE MAN,”



“ THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI.”

PL. XXVIII.

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South, as I have found from experience, I must guard against even mentioning the book.

But films of "Uncle Tom's Cabin", strange to say, pass without let or hindrance, and are well received in any part of the States.

It was too much to hope that so universal a form of entertainment, so readily accessible at all times of the day to any child in possession of a few cents, would be exempted from the restraint of at least as tolerant a form of supervision as was applicable to the stage; and film censorship has long been an accepted fact. Moreover, if we agree that such censorship is necessary, we must acquiesce in its taking a more definite form, and erring on the safe side, compared with the licensing of performances proper to a theatre. For a film must be reviewed and passed once and for all, and its sponsors will be well advised to promote a standard calculated to comply with the probable requirements of every country.

Here it may be well to point out that, while the known existence of a film survey board may have a beneficial influence, its active operation cannot fail to be disastrous. A completed film positive should on no account be cut or altered, and the necessity of removing even ten frames, though ratified under the ægis of the censor, does not any the less destroy the picture's rhythm and carefully-blent composition.

Film censorship machinery cannot be either as tolerant or as severe as the more autocratic and patrician lore of the State control of stage plays, but the Trade-imposed veto can be lifted, or a sanction revoked, at the discretion of the Local Authority. The Birmingham Watch Committee declined to allow Miss Maud Allan to dance in bare feet, but the Lord Chamberlain authorized the performance of "Mrs. Warren's Profession" and "Salome". Hot and cold cannot be thus breathed by a Film Board of Review, and their necessarily moderate if discretionless

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policy must perforce tolerate much gross vulgarity and consistent nastiness, while it will remain for a Pennsylvania or Ohio local committee to decide that, whereas a girl may possibly be allowed to smoke in a picture, she must on no account appear to enjoy doing so.

If the semi-official censorship feels obliged to leave the latter stages of refinement to the fondly-dreamed day when the public will exercise a sense of good taste scarcely compatible with the aim of the studio, we may at least be assured that the definitely objectionable will but rarely be allowed to pass. A brief contemplation of the stages of Paris and New York gives us some idea of the debt we owe to the organizations answerable for the more strait-laced overhauling of the film.

The French police will occasionally demur at the staging of stark-naked chorus girls, and in New York the authorities may interfere when a maiden publicly bathes in champagne (even though, in a religious film of Mr. de Mille's, it would be quite appropriate for her to bathe in goat's milk). An uneasy murmur may arise from the public themselves, as was the case during the New York season of 1924, when we had "Rain" at the Elliott Theatre, concurrently with "Artists and Models" at the Shubert and "The Lullaby" at the Knickerbocker. Credit must be given for these gestures, and Sir Seymour Hicks has condoned the prevalence, on the American stage, of what might at first seem to be appalling profanity. He explains that the Americans, being a very godly people, are on exceptionally intimate terms with the Deity.

But all this is comparatively beside the point. Clean, hearty fun derived from gibes at the expense of woman's chastity, and the inexhaustible humour of prostitution, are all very well, but I take exception to the super-refinements introduced by those acknowledged experts who have made a life-long study of filth. Shameful references of this nature,

which could be tolerated only by a bestially-minded audience, are not unusual in the music-halls of England, whose managements take advantage of their freedom from the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain. A little surprise awaits some of these managers, who do not appreciate the fact that their exemption from submitting programmes for censorship is based on the circumstance that they have no legal right to present stage plays, sketches or dialogue at all, their licence being for music and dancing only.

Films are only too often vulgar and objectionable, but I am bound to testify that never, in twenty-five years, have I seen a film which contained even the lightest suggestion of those revoltingly vicious and disgusting improvements upon ordinary immorality.

Yes, the censorship is all to the good, and its abuses and occasional puzzling vagaries are not without parallel in other aspects of social legislation. So is it with the stage, for instance. Shakespeare makes frequent use of the archaic Roman Catholic exclamation "By'r Lady"—apparently harmless enough, if not almost meaningless—and yet it is stated that for many years the Lord Chamberlain of England would not allow the expression in any modern play. When Mrs. Patrick Campbell had the opportunity of saying it in "Pygmalion" (in reply to an enquiry whether Eliza would like to walk through the Park), her pert "Walk? Not b'r'lady likely!" caused roars of delighted if half-guilty laughter.

There are many points of divergence between the film censorship codes of England and the United States (for instance, the Americans will not permit films of the *Unmarried* and *Damaged Goods* type), but they are in full agreement on several issues, such as a veto on apparent cruelty to animals, levity in treating of Biblical characters, and "elaborate preparations for suicide".

Yet both countries sanctioned the grossest brutality to a dog, portrayed with sickening realism in *Tol'able David*,

the suicide episode in *Dinner at Eight* was so self-explanatory as to give immediate work to the Coroner; Old Testament patriarchs receive about as much reverence in the States as a penniless scholar. After indignant protests had been conveyed to me as to the offensive nature of *Father Noah's Ark* and *The Diplomaniacs* (which I subsequently confirmed for myself), I addressed a quite urbane letter to the British Board of Film Censors, enquiring if that body had actually awarded certificates to those films. I received a very curt intimation that such matters could not be discussed, save with film renters or Local Authorities.

As to the evasions, they also vary with the country. In England, I gather, it has not been found possible to check the disgraceful practice of buying up tickets for successful plays, or for the Tennis Championships at Wimbledon, and re-selling them at profiteering prices, whereas the "ticket-shavers" of the United States (or at any rate of New York) have somehow been persuaded to discontinue their activities. Some regulations can be circumvented by mere children, and a recent diverting experience reminded me of an ingenious imposition practised upon the Great Western Railway by bill-brokers of tender years.

Great pains had been taken to popularize the seaside town of Weston-super-Mare, and it was eventually necessary to build a separate railway station (the only one of its kind in the country) solely for accommodating excursion trains. The price of the day trip was attractively reasonable—much less than the ordinary single fare—and this of course led to anomalies. On arrival at their destination, travellers were pestered by small boys, begging for the return half of the ticket!

I was, as I say, reminded of this a few weeks ago, when I witnessed an amusing frustration of the censorship by-law that a film which has been restricted to a limited or "A" certificate may not be witnessed by children unless they are accompanied by adults. I was standing outside a

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cinema where an "A" film was being shewn, when to my astonishment four pennies were thrust into my hand by a diminutive urchin who pleaded "Take me in, mister!" The Japanese have an extensive cinema industry of their own, and in view of their strict conventions (under which, for instance, kissing is forbidden) a rigorous censorship is applied to films imported from America. The benefit of this supervision is somewhat modified, perhaps, by the street hawkers' habit of retailing the removed portions of offending film, for a few pence, to children in Tokio and Nagasaki.

The Soviet film *Battleship Potemkin* having been banned by the British Board of Film Censors and also by the London County Council (who have the over-riding option of permitting an uncertificated subject to be shewn), the advertised exhibition of the film called for considerable ingenuity. I duly arrived at the place appointed, only to find that the police had vetoed the scheme on a technical illegality. Another *locale* was therefore hurriedly decided, and although the address was not publicly disclosed, mysterious lines and arrows chalked on the road and pavement gave a clue. By outrageous fortune the police had opposing ended some of these arrows; however, I soon found the new headquarters of lawlessness, and a hopeful queue was starting to form. Just before the scheduled time of opening, more police officers appeared, taking notes of names and addresses, choice of favourite prisons, and so on, and I realised that it was getting late.

I still have a ticket of admission for *Potemkin* which I shall be pleased to sell, or would exchange for anything useful.

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vi. *The Picture Theatre in Different Lands.*

"Langham Place was reached, and . . . in the small hall . . . before the platform, an enormous white sheet was stretched.

"Bobbie had been highly delighted in seeing several of these wonderful pictures, representing a fire-engine tearing off to a fire; a troopship filled with soldiers going off to the war; the King witnessing the trooping of the colours (sic) at Whitehall; . . . a country railway station with a tiny black tunnel in the distance, from which first one and then another little puff of white smoke appeared, and at last, out came a tiny little train."—"The Cinematograph Train" (G. E. Farrow, 1904).

I distinctly remember my first visit to the movies (as, I suppose, do all of us). I had been sent to boarding school in England, and almost immediately after landing I was taken to Plymouth Town Hall, and saw dancers, the inevitable Chicago fire engine and Alpine sports. I remember the general impression that horses were more natural and wonderful on the screen than human beings.

The United States had quite outstripped England at that time, though, hundreds of picture theatres having been opened during the winter of 1903-4, to shew *The Great Train Robbery* and *The Great Bank Robbery*. They were generally called Electric Theatres (because the illumination, and afterwards the projector drive, was electric), Biograph or Bioscope Theatres, and, derisively, "Picture Palaces". To this day, the projector compartment in a music-hall is called "Bioscope Box", and "Biograph" remains the name, after 29 years, of the cinema in Wilton Road, London—the first to be licensed in England. I think those descriptions were an improvement on some which obtain to-day, for at least the early christeners knew what they were talking about.

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If we consider the exact meaning of certain of the names now in vogue, we shall see just how aptly-applied they are:—

Scala—A ladder to greatness. The famous Italian home of opera.

Capitol—Roman Citadel. By extension, the Senate House at Washington, D.C. By extension, a similar domed building in New York.

Astoria—A hotel or other public building in New York, named in honour of a family celebrated in the city's history. Laughably inappropriate for a privately-owned cinema in an English village.

Plaza (mispronounced "Plarzur"),

Granada, Lido, Trocadéro and *Rivoli*—Continental place-names, about equally matched for unhappy misuse.

Odeon ("theatre") would be suitable by itself, but "Théâtre de l'Odéon" (in Paris) seems as bad as *Suwani River* or *The El-Dorado*. Perhaps it is merely to make things quite clear, as in the case of a film actress's friend who was introduced to me as Betty Elizabeth So-and-So.

England might have been more quickly enthusiastic about picture theatres, except that in the early days they were in rivalry with skating-rinks. Constantinople had its cinema by 1905, and Stockholm recently built its hundredth, whereas Barcelona, a city of 70,000 inhabitants, had only one example (and doubtless has to-day). The biggest in existence are probably the Roxy, New York (6,500 seats), the Gaumont Palace, Paris (6,000), the Trocadero, Newington, near London (5,500) and the Capitol, New York (5,200). The Roxy has a complicated stage, equipped with 1,000 lighting switches and five hundred resistance dimmers.

Comfort and efficiency vary tremendously, as the reader will not require to be told. Even up to the present time, certain cinemas are very badly designed, and I was recently

astonished at the ignorance of the most elementary principles, shewn in the building of an elaborate and expensive picture theatre at Stamford Hill, near London. Charges for admission seem to have an equally wide range. Although I personally have never paid less than twopence (excluding admission by Press ticket), I understand that reasonably-priced seats have been available, especially in country districts.

The poorest value I can remember having encountered was unwittingly given by a religious organization during the war. Despite the facts that the building was erected by generous public subscription, that second-hand films were supplied free, and that operators were obtained for the Army pay of one shilling per day, these social benefactors—doubtless in all innocence—charged the troops 1 fr. 50 for admission to their obsolete programme. Only a few weeks ago, by contrast, I obtained for one shilling a splendid seat for a capital up-to-date programme in the very heart of London's West End, namely, at the Astoria Cinema, and it was in the evening, too. Here I must make honourable mention of the Peshawar Picturedrome—a condemned barrack *bangala* where, for the consideration of Rs.2, one was privileged to see three-year-old films and enjoy a “full string orchestra” of piano and two violins, which could play nothing but “Colonel Bogey”.

At a cinema near Victoria Station, London, the public are asked to pay a shilling in advance, before being allowed to stand in a queue on the chance of subsequently obtaining admission. A very amusing ramp is practised by a travelling showman who induces people to purchase a “season ticket” of admission to six separate film performances. It is true that he can refute any accusation of being “here to-day and gone to-morrow”, but only because he goes on the same day. To the ordinary cinema-goer, however, the most familiar imposture is the announcement that only expensive seats are available, a statement which obtains a

foundation of truth by the simple process of increasing the price of all but two rows of shilling seats to two shillings and sixpence, and so on pro rata, during well-patronised hours. Some cinemas shamelessly announce that the prices will be advanced on Saturdays and public holidays.

Here again, the remedy is in the hands of the public, and on many counts it is unfortunate that they can be induced to pay a dollar or 5/6d. to see an ordinary film programme, for no other industry so abuses grossly inflated payment for indifferent workmanship.

Although, as we have seen, its picture house had only one tune, the important Indian outpost naturally possessed superior advantages as to variety and quality of film entertainment, compared with similar ventures in the wilds. It was discovered that a West African operator had for several months shewn a religious film to converted natives, blissfully unconscious that it was invariably projected backwards, and on another occasion Samuel Goldfish made the bright suggestion that a welcome change might be provided for an equally unsophisticated village if their one and only film were in future shewn back to front. In Australia the cinemas are often cheap and cheerful, and the Commonwealth is, of course, famed for its hard woods. More than one movie house on the China coast keeps a stock of only one subject, which gives never-failing delight and is projected again and again and again as long as life lasts, after which it is popularly supposed to be sent to Littlehampton.

England still has one cinema which has not been converted for talking films, and perhaps Manchester readers would care to let me know what steps are taken to keep its programme up-to-date.

Smoking is obviously a disadvantageous practice in a projection theatre, and yet very few countries other than the United States suppress it. The evil is somewhat lessened with the recent improvements in forced draughts; and if the image is projected from the ground floor level,

there would perhaps be no such objection to smoking in the balcony: but this arrangement seldom obtains. In any case, it is difficult to understand how a pipe can be enjoyed at the pictures—by anyone—and it would be a great improvement if smoking could be restricted to the use of tobacco. The Americans further forbid the practice of “petting”, although married couples may hold hands on giving previous notice to the guard. A dim general illumination is obligatory, as it is, also, under the London County Council, and deliberate infraction of the rule will be followed by withdrawal of the licence. The “cinéma intime” of Paris formerly had its unadvertised counterpart in London, and in one of the biggest capitals of Europe I knew a luxurious picture palace where the lights were never turned up from morning to night, and the quite private boxes could be screened by heavy curtains. I understand that, in an attempt to cater for all tastes, films were shewn as an additional attraction.

In Japan the unmarried men and girls must sit apart, and a *benshi* explains what the film is about. I have often felt the need for this official.

One screen at a time, as may be imagined, is the general rule, but it is possible for a cinema to have two screens, rather smaller than the usual size, with separate programmes on different sides of the hall. A patron who enters in the middle of one of the pictures can, in that case, commence on the other side, and thus save valuable time. Now I suppose someone will ask what happens when the right-handers wish to have the lights up for their musical intermission. Three screens, side by side, were necessary for the theatres shewing Abel Gance's historical pageantry film, “Napoléon,” and in the cinema at Alexandria the main screen was supplemented by a smaller square one.

Historic El Iskenderiyeh is a cosmopolitan place, and the exhibitor necessarily took advantage of the resource to which I have already alluded—that of having the sub-titles

printed in three languages. These therefore appeared in French, English and Italian. The additional facility of a separate little screen for sub-titles only, shewing the Arabic and modern Greek versions, enabled quite a large proportion of the inhabitants to attend the movies. The outside posters were in French, for I remember than on one occasion the feature subject was *Pour son Grand Amour*. I have not been to Alexandria since the re-birth of talkies, and should be interested to know what arrangement is now made.

No amount of sub-titles, however, has been known to restrain the ardour of the exasperating friend who explains things. The screen hero lands a beauty on the jaw of the crook who has wrecked the car, and for several yards around we are regaled with this intellectual commentary:—" 'Is motor's broke—see? 'E can't git it ter go. 'E's 'it that bloke—see? They're 'avin' a quarrel."

How differently audiences react to the lure of the movie in different countries, and how their taste varies! In India, I find, the populace appreciate a strong melodrama or detective serial, and I noted with some surprise that the Swiss were quite enthusiastic about the Alpine film, *White Hell of Pitz Palü*. Smart and expensively-mounted society dramas went well in Scoontharp, a half-civilized mining camp which boasted a cinema performance on two nights per week . . . and yet the inhabitants, when they are ill, take pig-powders, and if you ask to see a pair of shoes, the store-keeper puts the quite unanswerable question: " Ay, Soonday or wairkin'?"

It is a far cry from the rabid enthusiasm of America, with her daily change of programme starting at 10 a m., to the comparative indifference which often obtains elsewhere. Once, when undertaking a tedious journey to Lincoln, I found myself stranded for some time at the junction, an infernal place named Saxilby. "Is there a picture theatre in this town?" I hopefully asked of the youngest

inhabitant. The girl turned on an astonished and contemptuous leer, and retorted: "This bain't town; this biz coountry!" The brat was certainly right . . . and what a coountry. On arrival at Lincoln in the pouring rain, I still had to kill time, preferably not by drowning, and was glad to annihilate some of it in a cinema.

Many people thus regard the picture palace—as a refuge from the rain; a place for a quiet talk or smoke—and I have often known women bring their p'rams, babies and knitting. In Calais there was a cosy little café with a nice screen and good films (in silent days), and taking a vacant seat at a little table occupied by several French Army officers, I prepared for some harmless relaxation. Without the book of words (as I have previously remarked) it is difficult to tell just what is afoot, and I therefore asked my companions what the film was about, if any, and how far gone it was, so to speak. They were very polite, and made extensive enquiries of all their colleagues, but without the slightest result.

Indeed, they added, until I had brought the matter to their notice . . .

We were soon chatting enthusiastically about a new aeroplane "auto-stabilisateur". A lady wearing a very big hat at the theatre, it may be remembered, was asked by the gentleman behind her whether she would mind keeping her head still, as otherwise he obtained occasional distracting glimpses of the stage; but in our case the screen was no hindrance.

It is unnecessary to say that the compatriots of Gaboriau and Mérimée can enjoy a mystery or a romance, but they are very, very cynical in the presence of lavishly-dressed films shewing the alleged everyday standard of living in America. No-one can be more sardonic than the Frenchman when he wishes, and none of them will be bothered with pretentiousness, in films or elsewhere. They arrogantly coin their own names for screen favourites:—Mary

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Miles, Charlot, Taillule Banquette, and so on, and their satirical impertinence is reflected in many current expressions. What a world of malice is contained in "*poseur*" "*boudoir*", "*parvenu*", " *Jérémade*", "*vêtu comme un marié de samedi*".!

A family from Paris were loftily enquiring about rooms in a comfortable and delightful hôtel near the Spanish frontier. Englishmen, Spaniards and Americans seemed to be thoroughly enjoying their stay in the Pyrenees, but it remained to satisfy the natives. As I arrived on the landing where a bedroom was being shewn, I heard the younger Frenchman remark: "*T'é, c'est joli: ça donne sur le cabinet!*"

A bell summons Bretons, on any evening when the manager has triumphed over the apparatus, to the little cinema at Dinard, but in Paris it is of course sufficient to post a notice of "*spectacles aujourd'hui*" on one of those shameless circular enclosures of metal, like overgrown rusty green pillar-boxes. On my first visit to a palatial building in the Boulevard des Invalides, where *Cabiria* was being shewn, I noted with interest that my ticket of admission made reference to a luxury tax which the French Government had just introduced.

Their example was quickly followed by several other countries, and this tax is still payable in respect of any "entertainment", a term which has been officially ruled as including Laurel and Hardy comedies and practically all other films. It is only a war-time measure, however, designed to meet a certain emergency, and we may expect its withdrawal in due course. The American Government are making excellent progress with their Civil War accounts, and in England the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851 have recently issued an encouraging interim report.

Films are included amongst the things which the Germans take fairly seriously, and in the days before talkies

they used to attach considerable importance to the musical accompaniment. It was deemed to be in no way undignified for the music master of the famous Moravian College¹ to play the piano at the local cinema after school hours, and he was so enamoured of my album of popular music that I had difficulty in regaining it.

"Erste platze" were I Mk. or M.1.50 in price, and quite a good seat was obtainable for the equivalent of 6d. (less than the cost of a pound of sugar). Dante's "Holle" (as they called it), comedy, drama and war stories were mixed in the usual way, and there were also somewhat vulgar cartoons uncomplimentary to foreign Powers. In the national film gazette I watched the Imperial German manœuvres, and as the *Life of Wagner* succeeded it, and was in turn followed by the melodrama *Für fremder Schulden* ("For Another's Sin"), Herr B— would methodically work through my album, almost from cover to cover, little knowing how short a time remained during which he could watch those manœuvres from so comfortable a seat.

After the war, the German taste ran still more to music, and musical comedy films were devised, which, although themselves silent, had a moving beat arrangement that gave the time to a singer on the platform.²

I am afraid that in other countries the music received less careful attention, and I recollect two authentic cases where in my opinion a more appropriate choice might have been made. In a prison execution scene, the pianist played Tosti's "Good-bye", and the "War March of the Priests" was rendered by a small orchestra during a gazette item shewing a meeting of a Diocesan church conference. In English cinemas, although an incidental accompaniment has always been allowed without restriction, the orchestra must not play "God Save the King"

¹ Disbanded since the war.

² The engagement of a professional "compère," to converse with the screen characters, is necessary for the 1935 film "We must have Love."

at the end of the performance, unless a special music licence has been obtained.

Those gorgeously attired commissionaires do not loom large in my Continental memories, despite their traditional recruitment from amongst admirals of the Runitanian Navy. What generous value some of them had to give for their salary! Certain managements would require them to don fancy costumes and other get-ups to help with the publicity of any special films, and for *Nanook* you would see the unfortunate fellow sweltering in arctic skins, whereas the previous week, to advertise *Officer 666*, he had been an American policeman.

I was unfortunately away during the week when they had *Adam's Rib*.

I used to like the way in which the box-office girl would tender to you, with one hand, a curiously-shaped metal disc, while she would hold out her other hand at a side window, for the commissionaire to return the disc to her after its three-foot journey.

Yes, I think many of us can recall some very diverting memories of picture-theatres here, there and everywhere. Personally I can still hear the Waldteufel waltzes, and smell the sweet disinfectant that the attendant so impartially sprayed over everyone, twenty-five years ago! Day-light projection; rear projection (as still obtains in some cinemas in London); practically no projection at all. Hard seats and comfortable seats; the dreadful early piano with its fortissimo arpeggios, succeeded by the instrumental quartette, eternally dispensing "Hearts and Flowers", "Light Cavalry", "Fingal's Cave" and "Mélodie d'Amour."

The "effects" boy imitated the sound of horses' hoofs by means of two half-cokernut shells, until 3.30, when he had to help with the tea. When everyone had received a cup of tea and two ginger biscuits (which were free in all but the cheapest seats) the effects boy would reappear, very,

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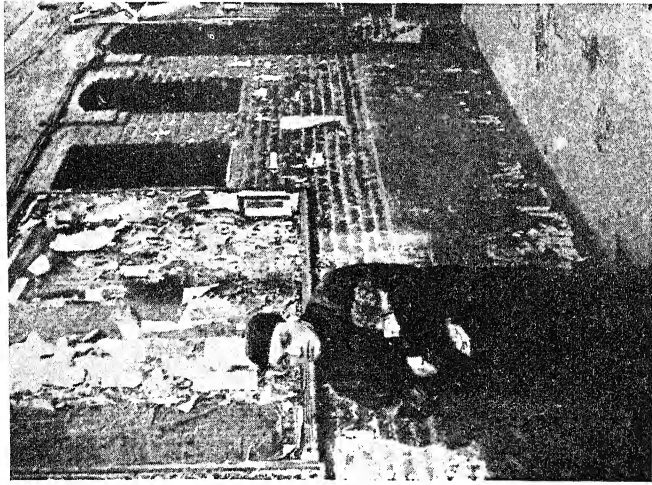
very carefully holding a cup of tea and cautiously navigating down the long aisle. We know exactly what is going to happen, and can time it to a fraction of a second; but it is fascinating in the dim light of the flickering beam to watch it being enacted once again.

No runaway drays, custard pies or buckets of white-wash impede the boy's progress, and at last he reaches the piano, and gives the girl a slight touch. The music stops abruptly, and she turns round, startled. The girl now gives a grateful smile and takes the cup of tea. It is so splendidly staged that we can hardly help clapping. No sub-titles are needed, and it is one of the most natural and convincing performances of the afternoon.

The boy is now free to continue his amusing mistimings. He returns to his little table, modestly screened off, and for the rest of the afternoon we are once more regaled with the cloppity-clop-clop of the express train's hoofs; the shrill steam whistle and clanking of machinery as the horses go by.

Before we can claim familiarity with the scope and influence of the cinema in all its aspects, it is essential to go to a really cheap dive—a primitive place where silent films are shewn with defective apparatus. Lest we make undue fun of the frequent breakdowns of the early times, let us remember that they are not unknown to-day. Indeed, I have experienced several just recently, and an electrical failure nowadays is a breakdown thorough and complete, remember. On the last occasion but one—some time last winter—the audience were very good-humoured, and after about half-an-hour they struck up "In the Gloaming", "When Lights are Low", etc., the manner in which the shadows were made to "softly come and go" being not unconnected with the pocket torches carried by humorists of the Royal Air Force.

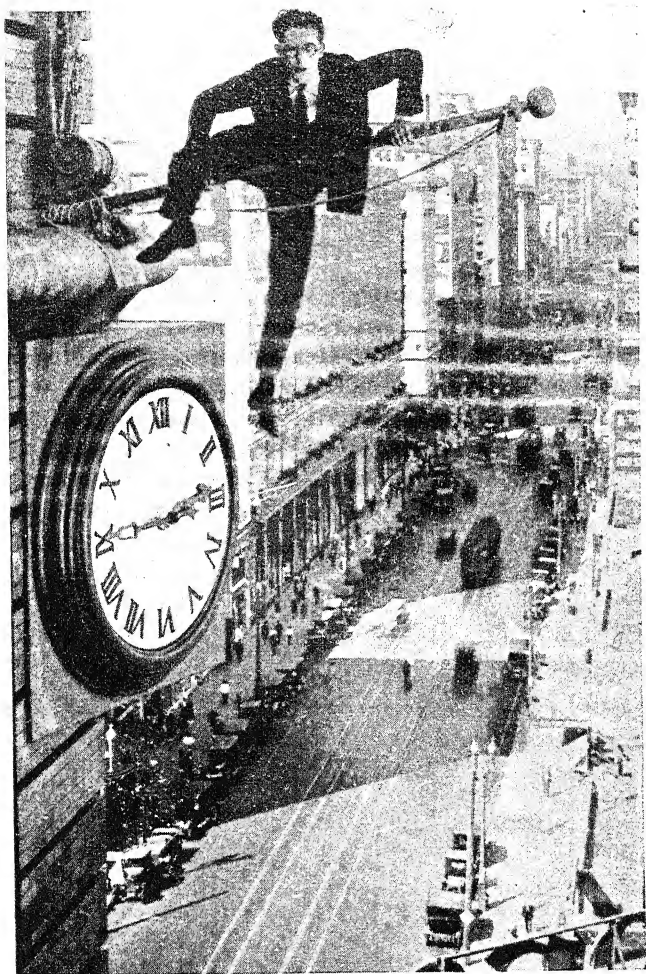
The unfortunate Miss Sally Eilers, who had just been pulled out of the Hudson, was still dripping copiously when



"BROKEN BLOSSOMS."



"'WAY DOWN EAST."



“ SAFETY LAST.”

the lights went up, fifty minutes later, which reminded me of the occasion when Emily Marceau sued her director for allowing her to remain suspended in mid-air for an hour and a half, while he went to his lunch.

Dirty lenses, cheap equipment and inadequate voltage caused many a blemish on the screen of former days, but even in the somewhat predominating breakdowns there was never a dull moment. "Travel Ghost"¹ indicated a faulty shutter; an unpleasant whistling throughout the hall meant incorrect registration of the frame in the gate (i.e. on the screen the characters' feet were on top of their heads). The supposed limitations of a silent screen were merrily overcome in a dozen different ways, and it is an inspiring experience to hear three hundred children roaring out:

EDDIE SENDS FOR THE SHERIFF'S POSS.

This, of course, was under the old régime. According to Mr. Philip Guedalla², "Now the half-witted dialogue is supplied by the management."

Pea-nuts and chewing-gum may be obtained in American cinemas, but in England one is allowed to smoke.

"Order, please! Order there!"

"Chorkleets, chorkleets! Cig'rettes, chorkleets!"

"Keep that child quiet, please."

TWO-GUN AL, HEADLINE SLICKER, PUTS HIS
Kib . . kib . . . KIBITZER NEXT TO A BIG GRAB,
BUT IN LINE FOR THE HOOSEGOW.

"Stow it, you kids, for ——— sake! Why the 'ell cawn't a bloke read fer 'isself? Wassit mean, Joe?" "Dunno, Bert. Spanish, ain't it?"

"Order, please! Quiet there, please!"

"Chorkleets, cig'rettes."

¹ An appearance of vertical creeping in the high-lights, through delayed occlusion or other shutter mal-adjustment (i.e. white objects in the picture cause an annoying reflection upwards). "Travel Ghost" and "Frame-line Hum" are occasionally in evidence to-day.

² Oxford Union, May, 1935.

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Friendly co-operation with the pianist is acknowledged in a slide flashed on to the screen:—

*Patrons are requested to refrain from whistling.
WE supply the entertainment.*

and other slides include:

One moment, please, while the reel is changed.

*Patrons who have seen the
entire programme are requested to leave, as
others are waiting.*

The latter appeal, though reasonable enough, is quite unavailing, and nowadays the exhibitor does not trouble to put it. Nevertheless, an instance came to my notice in 1932. It was at the cinema in the little village of E——, Middlesex, on a very slack Bank Holiday.

The management made personal application to the audience, asking if he would be good enough to leave, as the entire programme had been shewn twice through, for his exclusive benefit.

* * *

But there! Why not see a picture show for yourself?

END OF PART ONE.

Part Two Follows Immediately.

PART TWO

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THE REASONABLE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CELLULOID DRAMA.

*For Youth and Beauty and Romance
Still weave their ancient spell,
As in the days when Sappho sang
And Helen loved too well.*

1. *Thus Bad Begins.*

The phonograph parlor developed into the kinetoscope arcade, and the names of Edison and Pathé are associated at least as much with films as with talking machines (which two inventions were at one time separate and distinct). It seems, in fact, that the three present-day devices for the mechanisation of music, drama and transport have evolved side by side, and it is rather a coincidence that both the kinematograph and the automobile, derived from inventions of about the year 1870, were first presented before the public in about 1895. Both were well received in America—to put it mildly—but let us see how the more conservative Old World viewed their somewhat blatant arrival.

In England, the official apathy or antagonism which “had banned the steam coaches of Gurney and Hancock from the road, thus delaying progress by a century”*, relented in 1861 to the extent of allowing traction engines upon the highway, if they were preceded by a man on foot bearing a red flag. In 1878 the red-flag condition was waived, and in 1896 the generous Locomotives on Highways Act allowed “locomotives” weighing less than three tons to career about at 12 miles per hour, without the escort of a man on foot.

* *The World's Automobiles.*

It was thought that this new-found liberty ought to be celebrated by a public function, which at the same time would serve to bring cars into greater familiarity and less contempt; and therefore on the 14th November, 1896, the date of first operation of the Act, the Motor Car Club hopefully arranged a *sortie* of mechanical vehicles from London to the South Coast fishing village of Brighthelmstone, a famous objective since coaching days. As I write these lines, fellow passengers in my train are reading an account of another anniversary celebration of the Brighton run, for the English commemorate it every year—why, I cannot think.

Possibly distance lends enchantment to the view, but at all events the scheme was a lamentable failure. Far from proving the reliability of motor vehicles, it brought them into hopeless disrepute. Far from earning the good will of the public, it engendered a hostility which has never been overcome.

The British Navy still wear black in memory of Lord Nelson. The Bar are in official mourning up to the present time, for the death of Queen Anne. I am led to the conclusion that, like the hundred-year punishment awarded to a regiment in the Peninsular War, for irreverence during Church Parade, the heavy official discouragement and the bitter Press invective against cars and motorists, persisting in England to this day, commemorate the inexcusable incident of manslaughter which crowned the disasters of that initial outing, thirty-nine years ago.

* * *

The 1897 celebration of that fashionable and noted function of aristocratic France, the annual Charity Bazaar, bade fair to provide a spectacle of such interest and brilliance as would eclipse all previous efforts. It was a happy idea to include a demonstration of the *cinématographe*, the intriguing philosophical novelty whose possibilities had already been presaged by Trewey, Méliès and Marey.

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From the point of view of the champions of M. Lumière's enterprise, on the other hand, the distinguished patronage of the Bazaar Committee would be a very valuable asset, going a long way towards setting a definite seal of approval upon films as serious and artistic entertainment and a thoroughly respectable resource of science, whereas previously there had perhaps been a tendency to look askance at them.

The Bazaar was duly held in the Rue de la Boétie, Paris, on the 4th May, 1897, and there can be no question whatever that the cinématographe, shewing a *mi-carême* procession and other topical views, was the sensation of the day. The film caught fire, and in the absence of any safety measures, the outbreak spread throughout the building. Over two hundred members of the French nobility perished in this fire, of which, needless to say, bitter memories are still retained.

* * *

2. *The Case for Tolerance.*

Must films always labour under the stigma of lacking respectability, and suffer by contemptuous comparison with the stage and other arts? My view is that such an attitude is incorrect and inadmissible, and although I understand that some strictures in this book are considered harsh, I have no intention of writing from a priggish standpoint, and will hardly be accused of lofty indifference to films in general.

I have too little patience with the prig and the *précieux* in other arts. In the theatre world, there would be short shrift for the fatuous ass who gibbers about projecting his ego into the illimitable, for the pursuit of drama on a solvent basis means plenty of hard work and commonsense. Elsewhere, however, we are burdened with these pests, who ought to be in some sort of home. Hideous atrocities pass

as sculpture (through our lack of the moral courage to describe them with the candour of a child), and another variety of "artist", after making a noise like a tray of tea-things falling downstairs, will call it his symphony in M Blunt. Oh! if only some modern Swift would expose the abominable hypocrisy of these musical obsessions, that a simple idea must have a complex expression, and that it is an offence to compose or play anything with the slightest discernible melody.

Regarding the stage, music, films: is it so contemptible an ideal to wish to give pleasure to others? A well-known writer appears to deplore the cinema's function of providing mere entertainment. Art produces entertainment, though herself concealed, and if this be a fault, I could often wish that films had sinned more deeply. Of course, there are widely diverging ideas as to what constitutes entertainment, and at the North London traffic point known as the Manor House I saw a poster, adjuring the seeker after unbridled thrills and reckless enjoyment to "Hire a Private Tram".

* * *

Offences alleged against the Film.

So far as alleged general and inherent defects are concerned, the most usual of the many accusations brought against the cinema by those who feel themselves to be superior to it, or who disdain to understand its place and functions, are probably the following:—

That the screen is inferior to the stage in realism.

That it is highly coloured with sentimentality, and abounds in plainly defined conventions and artificial distortions.

That its requirements of an invariably happy ending, purity of heroine and idealism in general, entail a blinking of stern actualities and a serene independence of mundane details.

That its cheap sensationalism and unrefined treatment cause its appeal to be restricted to the non-intelligent.

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In Extenuation.

I think that if we are frank with ourselves, many of us will confess that, however much we may despise them at the time, an agreeable memory is brought to us by films seen in the past. Hundreds of people are basically fond of this entertainment without admitting it, and I notice that the bright village lads who jeer at a sentimental picture, and make loud smacking noises when the screen lovers kiss, nevertheless go again and again in their crowds. *Haec olim meminisse juvabit*—silly Keystone police and all!

The fetish of Realism invites the swift retort that the film has other functions than to give a mere photograph of actual life: symbolism is far more its province. Apart from that, I have never known a time when definite realism was sensibly deficient on the screen. Even in the earliest days, excited cowboys in far-western cinemas used to ruin the lantern-sheet with revolver shots impetuously fired at the shadowy Indians and villains. Years later, the sophisticated 42nd street audience at *'way Down East* yelled out encouragement to the image of Richard Barthelmess, adjuring him to "Hurry! hurry!!"

No one could dispute that the popular photoplay abounds in sentiment, but we are here concerned, not with the film's incidental and separable faults (which will be considered later), but with the weaknesses and disadvantages that are supposed to be essentially part and parcel of the cinema itself. Such a supposition is apparently entertained by Mr. Elmer Rice, whose gentle satirizing of films in general is entitled "Purilia", and takes the form of a most interestingly written melodrama. I fear that in attempting to expose the specific blemishes of the cinema I shall use language considerably more forcible than Mr. Rice's, and, sooth to say, his presumed satire makes a story so engrossing that I personally would pay a good deal to see anything so intelligent in film form. I gather that this was not what

Mr. Rice had in mind; but we have a similar precedent in Rex Ingram's *Turn to the Right*, which was intended to make fun of melodrama with unbridled sardon, but was gravely accepted as an excellent drama.

In specific instances of faultiness, as I say, Mr. Rice is not severe enough, but in his general condemnation of the film, his stage-fostered viewpoint has surely carried him too far.

As will be seen from the extract quoted on page 51, the clever author of "The Adding Machine" attacks the film close-up, thus leading us regretfully to suspect that he has a limited grasp of the cinema. Many other writers have deplored the film's apparently artificial conventions and misrepresentations, but are these any worse than obtain in drama and literature? The romantic popular story of Abelard and Héloïse, for instance, is an almost deliberate distortion, as has been shewn by Mark Twain, and our fixed ideas as to the siege of Troy, and even the career and death of Napoleon, are not unlikely to be equally mythical. The author of the Shakespeare plays, also, (and I see there is a movement on foot suggesting that he might have been Shakespeare) undoubtedly took comparable liberties with his subjects.

Regarding the happy ending and the love interest, it will be time enough to banish idealism from films when it has disappeared from poetry, painting and literature. Those who take pleasure in contemplation of the sordid will find many sources of enjoyment other than the picture show, and the reader must decide for himself whether he prefers the idealist assumption of maidenly innocence, or the view so gracefully expressed by Homewood's counsel, in *Gibson vs. Homewood*,* that "it was ridiculous to think that a girl of 23 could be chaste and pure".

In *Purilia*, says Mr. Rice, there seems to be no birth without wedlock, and (again) immense hôtel bathrooms do not compensate for an embarrassing lack of other conveniences.

* New York State Causes, 1923.

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On the first point, Mr. Rice is definitely mistaken. As to the second—well! well! there is no accounting for tastes (to coin an expression which I am surprised that no one has used before). I believe those “other conveniences” were an artistic feature of the Grand Guignol sketch, “G.H.Q. Love”, and one of my friends keeps a fine range of Shakespeare’s works in the quaintly unconventional setting which the Caliph Vathek found “ill-adapted to the reception of embassies”.* Perhaps, therefore, it is reasonable to protest that those aesthetic possibilities have been neglected on the screen.

* * *

A bon chat, bon rat.

The film is of commonplace appeal, we read. Quite so, because the enormous majority of the populace seem to have vulgar tastes (as the derivation of “vulgar” implies). The smell of garlic formerly distinguished plebeian from patrician, across the width of the Via Appia, and the film has to cater for the modern Philistine who, on being given an exquisitely-prepared dish, will immediately souse it in vinegar; who, on acquiring a delightful Corot, will seek to brighten it with vermilion. Harsh sights, scents and sounds are alike bad art, equally with commonplace treatment, and our analogy need not be confined to films. I have known Beethoven’s Minuet transformed into a sort of waltz called “Mignonette” (and with great popular success); favourite songs require “ideal” to rhyme with “feel”, and “Riviera” to be pronounced in three syllables; in one instance the line “We’re a couple of soldiers” is forcibly matched with “marching shoulder to shoulder”! The film must usually be devised to conform with the majority taste, and in this it follows distinguished precedent. Only the popular support enables us to see films at all, for the celluloid traffic is expensive.

* “Vathek.”—Wm. Beckford.

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3. *The Stage Comparison Bogey.*

It is seldom that a literary or dramatic work will be found to be actually suitable in equal measure for both stage and screen, but in makeshift practice, of course, film and stage play of the same theme frequently coincide. When weighing up the rival merits, in such circumstances, of "the film or the piece" (to use a curious expression current amongst the middle-class English), or even when no specially competing claims are evident, many people will be heard to say "I'd rather see a good play, any day." It must be admitted, also, that under existing conditions the adverse implied criticism is frequently justified by an undoubtedly lower standard of art, tradition and motive.

In essence and in principle, however, the stage and the screen are based on different ideas, and have little in common; and even in practice the film will generally have the advantage at points of supposed resemblance. Rightly or wrongly (wrongly, I think), the two arts were displayed in conjunction at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, under the management of Mr. Collins in 1901. The production was Cecil Raleigh's "The Great Millionaire", and this must have been one of the earliest appearances of a "motor car" (as it is called in England) on stage or screen.

The car played quite a big part in this melodrama, and to shew the incidents of the exciting chase in which the villains were overtaken, this spacious and swiftly-moving portion of the story was presented by the cinematograph. Similarly in "Partners Again", a sequel to the American stage success, "Potash and Perlmutter", the momentous automobile ride of Abe and Mawruss was depicted by film.

Again, the film's use of incandescent lighting seems to have had an influence on the stage, as in the slow fade-out in the final scene of "Michael and Mary"*.

* Incorrectly employed to denote a lapse of time. The stage should properly account for all time during which the curtain is up.

Certain presentations as a whole, while roughly appertaining to the theatre, would seem more conveniently adapted to the film's resources; for instance, a drama of fighting or aviation, marine and travel spectacles, thrillers of fire and flood. If "Hassan", "Kismet" and "The Garden of Allah" can be effectively given on the stage, what must be the asset of the cinema's notably greater scope to depict what is mainly vastness and impressive spectacle? On the other hand, H. G. Wells's fantasy, "The Invisible Man", could scarce come to life except as a sound film, and I have already mentioned the amusing farce "Identity Exchange", which I strongly recommend as typically suitable for a talking picture.

Ideally, such separate provinces of these various modes of expression as image and spoken word should never overlap, but practice makes imperfect, and there will be no need to be priggishly superior about a welcome form of cheap diversion.

The question at present before the meeting is whether the stage must necessarily triumph over every film presentation of the entertainment loosely known as a play. That it usually does so at present, as I have already advanced, is not quite the point. The film greatly errs in failing to use correctly its unrivalled resources for depicting action and grandeur set in landscapes painted by Nature's own brush. These are merely a few of the advantages not possessed by the stage. Now let us examine some theatrical disadvantages unshared by the film.

Hard at play.

To this end it will be necessary for us to contemplate for a short space the difficult and exacting work of the stage actor, and a few of the knotty problems that confront theatre managements. A little knowledge of the stage will probably not be uninteresting, although it will automatically debar us from ever becoming dramatic critics.

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First I will mention, as they occur to me, some of the insuperable obstacles in the way of theatrical perfection:—

Every different type of play should have a differently-designed stage.

A correctly - built theatre could not possibly seat an audience large enough to be remunerative.

No theatre has more than two seats from which the play can be seen and heard correctly.

No two companies will give the same performance of a play, and economic considerations make it impossible to provide the finest rendering save in big cities. It is impossible to give an identical performance on two different occasions unless the seats are filled by exactly the same audience.

Artificial lighting and scenery make it theoretically impossible for a player to be correctly made-up.

Failing a light-source at infinity, the midday sun cannot be represented.

* * *

With the exception of the third example quoted, not one of these drawbacks applies to the cinema. Fifty people, seated at approximately two-and-a-half lengths from the screen, can view the picture to perfection, and it can be admirably shewn to three hundred spectators at a time.

“If obliged to witness amateur theatricals,” says an old book on etiquette, “endure them with the best grace possible”; but I would go farther than this, and submit that attendance, and even participation, will be advantageous to the earnest student of dramatic expression. The preliminary rehearsals of a professional company are comparable with the amateurs’ dress-try-out, and it is always better to start at the bottom (unless you are learning to swim). Besides, even an amateur performance is quite capable of awakening hidden emotions and yearnings, such as a longing for a loaded gun, and nowadays there is a bar and a

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first-aid station. I once heard of a man who never enjoyed a really good laugh at the theatre until he had seen some amateurs doing "East Lynne".

It is said that the biggest part falls to the prompter, who is always hoarse after a performance, but in any case none of the players is ever satisfied with the part awarded, and all societies appear to seethe with jealousy and bickering. I was an amateur myself once, having been the King in "Hernani" thirty years ago, and I can assure grumbling non-professionals that they don't know when they are well off.

At last comes performance night, when with luck the players have the first opportunity of being introduced one to another. There will have been, to be sure, rather select attempts at rehearsal, rendered all the more trying because each player realises that he himself really needs no more coaching, but Heaven knows whether So-and-So will ever be good enough! Although not necessarily tined for St. Bartholomew's Eve, many an amateur play purports to be for a religious object, or is done after dark in sweet Charity's name. Apart from that, I understand that it gives pleasure to the members. I mention this in an attempt at explanation.

It will be best if we can take part in the play, but otherwise let us attend the performance, and resolve to make it a profitable study. Without experience, it is somewhat difficult to follow these plays, but at any rate the name may be obtained from the programme, and many valuable points can be picked up, if the words cannot. The chief faults of the amateur production will be found to be:—

- (1) Inaudibility.
- (2) Over-working of the prompter.
- (3) Fidgeting, clumsiness and self-consciousness.
- (4) Awkward hitches and unrehearsed fun with properties, lights and curtains.

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I am frequently asked to attend such performances, and in many cases a critical report is requested and gratefully acknowledged. In other instances, however, the societies appear to suffer from an impenetrable complacency. I particularly remember undergoing a sentence of "Tilly of Bloomsbury", given before a distinguished audience in London. One of the players, in his excitement, took a firm grip of the property banisters, which disappeared out of sight on his exit. I reported mildly that these players obviously carried all before them, but that staircases were usually considered to be landlord's fixtures. I have never since been troubled by that Society.

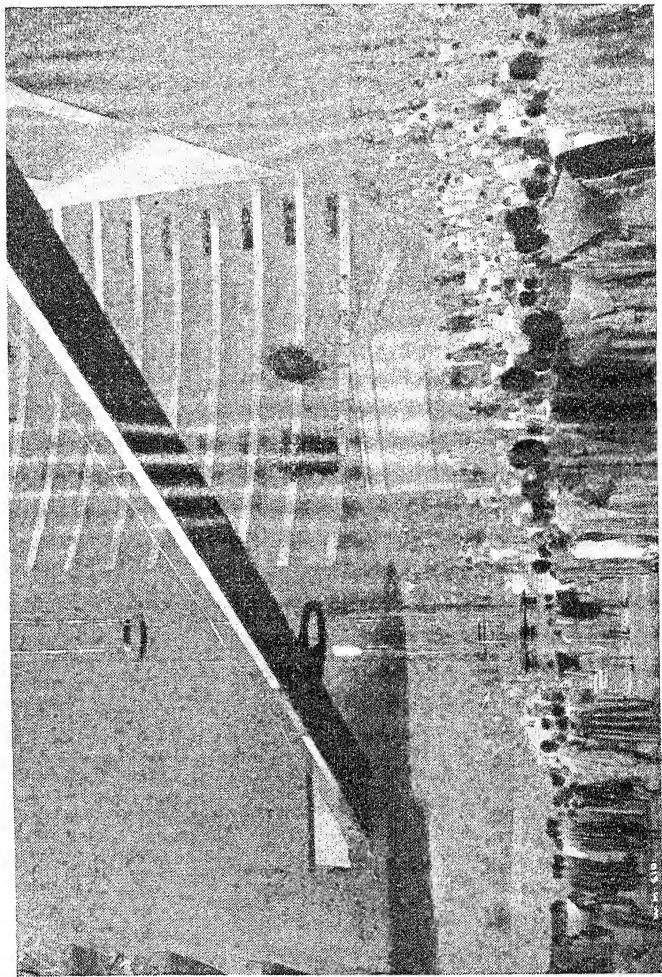
"I can't open the doors: they are evidently locked from inside", declares the butler in 'Alibi', whereupon a Bournemouth amateur, shaking the handle too hard, effectively overcame that difficulty, and provided the laugh of the evening.

* * *

Professionals too.

Now to come to the point. Although these pitfalls are more conveniently studied on the amateur stage, numbers 1, 2 and 4 await the professional also. A hitch with amateurs is amusing, but in a West-End production it is terribly serious. The doors at Bournemouth were merely open to good-humoured criticism, but the first-night performance of a new play, produced by me in London last year, was nearly ruined through the accidental jamming of a heavy iron door leading to the dressing-rooms. The non-professional prompter, too, is not without illustrious counterpart, for while the voice of the amateurtle is too often heard in the land—But let me relate the story that Sir Seymour Hicks tells against himself. It appears that many years ago, when he was officiating as prompter, his youthful enthusiasm induced him unwittingly to shew himself within stage limits. The next day a newspaper reported

BRITISH PROGRESS



DENHAM—"THINGS TO COME."

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that the prompter, although seen at rare intervals, soon became a firm favourite with the audience.

This distinguished veteran's very entertaining and valuable handbook, "Acting"*, contains several other stories of theatrical mishaps, including the following amusing example:—

Owing to carelessness of the property man, or otherwise, the revolver failed to go off "bang" when the fatal shot was fired. A resourceful player, retaining his presence of mind, declaimed: "Shot! and *by an air-gun!*", after which the audience refused to be serious.

On the professional stage, realism was carried unnecessarily far in a Paris performance of "Nuits Arabes", in which the heavy blade of a scimitar flew off, instantly killing a luckless player.

It was not carried far enough in the cases here described:—

During the production of "Ben Hur" at Drury Lane, with Sir Herbert Tree, the exciting race of four-horse chariots was presented with the help of a revolving stage (the chariots remaining relatively still, while the scenery whizzed past). In Tree's chariot, the horse nearest to the audience cleverly found that by edging slightly more down-stage, he was able to step outside the moving circle, on to the stationary part of the floor, thus saving much hard work. Few more ridiculous sights have been witnessed on the London stage than this chariot with three horses galloping madly, while the fourth stood motionless, patiently waiting for dinner-time.

"The Mayflower", at the Surrey Theatre, shewed on the stage the deck of the gallant ship. At a solemn and impressive moment, the whole side of the "property" vessel fell out, disclosing several non-Puritan "supers" whiling away the time with cards and beer.

It was a brilliant full-dress night at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, and a distinguished Continental virtuoso

* Cassell & Co., London.

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was conducting "Lohengrin". Perhaps the Scheldt was clogged up with weeds . . . at any rate, the swan could not be induced to move. Supers tugged and tugged at the invisible wires, but "mein lieber Schwan" remained obdurate. All hands were enlisted for a supreme effort, and the ill-fated bird's head and neck snapped off with a loud report.

* * *

We may well ponder over the remote possibility of disaster of this kind, and the reasonable assumption that the several performances will vary slightly, and sometimes fail to embody all the finest moments ever obtained in any previous playing. Sir Cedric Hardwicke tells us that it may be several weeks before he will be inspired with the final conception of his part, and thus it is unfair to judge a professional stage production by its first night.

But the film has no first-night uneasiness or possibility of hitch. It is the finally - realised perfection; the most polished of all rehearsals.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH FILMS?

1. *Diagnosis under difficulties.*

In principle it must appear an obvious conclusion that the shortcomings of the photoplay will be comprised in

Unsuitable choice of subject, and

Incorrect treatment.

We cannot, however, pronounce on a thing which we have not been allowed to see, and we are so very seldom able to view a picture in its intended and unmutated state that in the circumstances judgment is difficult.

The awful disadvantage of films, for all practical purposes, is wanton and senseless damage to the finished, edited positive. Even if we regard cinematography as the lowest of mercenary trades, run entirely to extract the maximum possible profit from the foolish and unintelligent, it would be difficult to find a parallel example of illogical cross-purposes in the whole realm of industry. The comments on specified pictures, in previous sections of this book, are offered on the distinct understanding that they refer to the genuine original film, of which the correct footage is in many cases purposely quoted.

Quo Vadis? and *Foolish Wives* were disgracefully mutilated; I have described the treatment given to *Les Trois Mousquetaires*; *Greed* was cut in halves, and Eisenstein, after taking 35 miles of negative for *Storm over Mexico*, surrendered it for Americans to cut down to six reels. Recollect for yourselves how the finely-drawn character of the Countess Tolst was utterly mauled beyond recognition in the reissues of *Dr. Mabuse*; how the wreckage remaining from the delicately-constructed *Love, Life and Laughter* was merely silly; and promise me that you will do your best to thwart the wicked practice of deliberately destroying the texture of a subject before letting the public see it at a reasonable price.

ii. The Art Without Tradition.

That the new art of cinematography could as yet inherit any venerable history of precedents would seem improbable; but perhaps, as it is so frequently likened to the stage, the view is held that the same interesting Thespian traditions are shared, or should be deemed to be common property.

As a preliminary to a process of sifting suppositions from facts, let us muse on some of these traditions and their intriguing origin.

A few of them are purely local, such as the three raps which precede a Paris theatre performance, or the erroneous convention followed in English pantomime, that Cinderella's slipper was made of glass; but others have a classic and honourable lineage. The phrase "a sinister villain" gives a clue to the reason, dating from ancient Roman times, why the Demon King must always enter from the prompt or left side of the stage. Equally firmly established is the rule that a pantomime principal "boy" must be played by a girl, and some of the feminine rôles by men. Strictly, of course, classic pantomime is silent, with all men's and women's parts interchanged. We do not entirely adhere to this, in that the performance is far from silent, but the general idea must be retained, and non-observance of the convention about the principal boy—so it is stated—brought about the only recorded failure at Drury Lane.

Harlequin, when hooded, is invisible to mortal eyes, and each of the colours in his "motley" represents a human emotion. We dare not fail to honour these traditions, and would not if we dared.

The late Miss Mary Brough, as a seaside landlady in *Turkey Time*, witheringly referred to the votaries of the *cothurnus* as "performing theatricals". I believe it is quite true that a country porter, when asked by the station-master whether there was much freight on the slow

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Sunday train, replied "Nothing but fish and actors". Nevertheless, antiquity inspires general respect and veneration for this wonderful art, one of the most difficult in existence.

Now let us turn to the phonograph parlor and the two-cent kinetoscope or mutoscope "amusement arcade", from which the picture theatre traces its sometimes steep descent.

Despite the enormous value of Edison's wonderful invention, anyone who could imitate an early phonograph was in great demand as an entertainer at parties. I leave it at that. The amusement booth contained a neat row of moving-picture machines, into which one dropped a penny and looked through the eye-pieces. The titles were announced on brightly-painted cards surmounting each machine:—"An Execution at Sing-Sing"; "For Men Only"; "Fun in a Girls' Dormitory"; "See her do the Splits"; "Legs, Lace and Loveliness".*

The point is: when will the film rise above this? Is it endeavouring to rise above it?

I am afraid it is the movies' own fault that they have not attained a higher status. They themselves lend colour to the disparaging reference to them in music-hall programmes, which as a grudging after-thought add at the bottom "... and the Bioscope". They consistently identify themselves with the lowest grade of intelligence, and insultingly assume that their patrons are on a par with film-makers for complete lack of education, thus going one better than the radio programme magazine, when it kindly explains that "Paso doble (Pierre Lenoir)" is *Double pace, by Stone Black*. In a sense they follow the theatre, but at a great distance. Seventy years ago, it is true, the crudest melodramas were presented on the stage, with the long-obsolete double title, of which one example was "Scratching Fanny; or The Bloodstains on the Blind". But this sort of thing was quite extinct in 1902, when films restarted such rubbish as "Tracked by Bloodhounds; or A Lynching at Cripple Creek".

* Actual examples.

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If a stage play is to be made into a film, immediate steps are taken to cut down its cultural level to the degree of barbarity flatteringly assumed in the audience. Either we change any foreign words, or we *deliberately mispronounce them*, lest the film should be accused of presumptuousness beyond its station. "Manon Lescaut" has to be "His Lady", and several necessary French words in *Jack's the Boy* are spoken in such a manner as to suggest a sympathetic feeling for the untaught movie spectator.* So long as it is only a film, even the Barrymores will talk about "rekkud" and "finnanseer".

In addition to disdaining culture, moviedom spurns hard work and honest endeavour, being content to bask in the disgraceful and disgusting overpayments lavished upon it by sycophant imbeciles. The films will never become a great art until these ill-bred, incompetent millionaires are re-assessed at their true value—generally thirty-five to fifty shillings a week for the stars, although the character players are worth far more.

Stage chorus-girls receive a minimum of seventy shillings a week, but I have mentioned several times that little if any analogy obtains. Needless to say, I am familiar with the film studios; but I have also appeared on at least 250 different stages. I have known girls rehearse hard from nine in the morning until three o'clock the next morning, and then have to give an opening public performance later in the same day. This is burning the midnight gas at both ends. It was quite usual for my company to rise early, move on to the next town, attend a morning rehearsal and give two performances. Even during a train strike, we had to arrive in time, with our belongings, at the scheduled theatre.

Some of the buildings, of course, could hardly be called theatres, and I have been in places where we have had to change under a staircase, something like the players at the newly-built Daly's Theatre, who had to be lowered

* Jules, for instance, was pronounced "Jools".

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on to the stage by pulleys. Our most disappointing reception was by an audience of seven. Our most flatteringly propitious was on arrival at a town where, through an inexcusable blunder, we had been billed to appear simultaneously at two different theatres, outside each of which a hopeful queue was forming. The problem caused me half-an-hour's rapid thinking.

* * *

Believe me, there is no comparison.

iii *More Anecdotes of the Hollywood Mind.*

"There's money in the War—There's money in the circus—There's money in movies."—"This Film Business"—R. P. Messel.).

"Squabs Pay"—(Typical American advertisement).

The bulk of American movies are a true reflection of the—er—people who make them, but they are most emphatically NOT representative of real Americans, any more than they resemble true films. Nor, I imagine, do the most typical citizens of the United States very enthusiastically lend their voices to the raucous pæan of self-advertisement for the supposedly "national" product. They can scarcely be proud of anything which so falsely portrays them.

I must explain that citizens of genuine American descent, whom I have been proud to number amongst my best friends, for many years, constitute but a small proportion of the people resident in the U.S.A. Astonishing though it may appear (for, as Æsop pointed out, a few croaking frogs in the meadow distract our attention from the valuable herds), they are educated, honourable and cultured, of a high level of attainment in literature and art, and *able to speak perfect English*. Their stage and concert platform maintain an excellent standard, and D. W. Griffith has pointed the way to a beautiful use of films.

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But there! I suppose this is common knowledge, and I can safely leave it to be assumed that any remarks in this book apparently unfavourable to Americans, or rather to the makers of American films, are intended to be thus construed.

As seen through Hollywood eyes, the end of all films is profit, and for the means to that end, nothing is too hot or too heavy. No spiritual flower is expected to grow in the Pacific dunghills of vulgarity, and it is rarely indeed that any consideration of good taste is allowed to stand in the way of big dividends.

The Hollywood type—not all of whom necessarily live in California—are apparently never happier than when capitalizing disaster. I remember, before films were such a fount of revenue, a sort of peep-show designed to turn to profitable account the frightful calamity of the 18th April, 1906, when San Francisco was destroyed by an earthquake and fire. Now, in September, 1934, we have the tragedy of the “Morro Castle” off the New Jersey Coast, and are invited to pay “25 cents to see the burning liner”! Someone can always be found, apparently, who will see the bright side of these things.

A New York Press photographer, by cunningly circumventing the regulations, obtained a photograph of Ruth Snyder in the execution chair at Sing-Sing, and it was published at enormous profit. According to Mr. Ben B. Hampton, “the great calamity of the autumn of 1918” was the signing of the Armistice, with its resulting loss of profit on war films.*

Their commendable respect for money was well conveyed in this graceful tribute paid by an admirer at a New York dinner to Jackie Coogan in 1923. “I offer a toast,” says he, “to Mrs. Coogan, the mother of our Jackie. Drink to the goose who laid the golden egg.” If I were asked to name my proudest moment, I should perhaps refer to my having been invited, as a little boy, to have tea with Edmond

* H.M., p. 201.

Rostand, but they would boast of having been kicked by Rockefeller. "Oh, no, I'm afraid we haven't any 'still' of that now," a pretty girl* told me at the Universal publicity department. "You see, *Foolish Wives* wasn't an important picture. Now the 'Hunchback of Notre Dame' was an important picture." (As a coincidence, I believe it was also a very profitable one)

I had sent along a letter to Mr. Griffith at the P—— Studios, and to my astonishment it was returned to me, marked "Unknown at this address". I still treasure the envelope. Mr. Griffith, it transpired, had moved to another studio. "Unknown" is good, though.

Accession to money or other greatness completely turns their heads. A colleague on another New York paper, sent to interview a movie star who was leaving for Europe, begged her for a pose that would look like something human, and suggested that she might hold her handbag, in a natural way. She haughtily turned on him and protested that she was not accustomed to carrying her own luggage. I hasten to explain that she is a nice girl, and quite good-hearted; but she had just married someone with a title. It was a very unfortunate remark, though, which she had occasion to regret on the following morning.

An announcement in a Californian magazine reads as follows:—

"Teach Doggie to Act. Why work, when your dog can earn money for you? Hundreds are now supporting their masters in luxury—Film Star Kennels, A——, Calif."

Finally, for this exquisite anecdote of the Hollywood mind, I am indebted to the authors of "Star-Dust in Hollywood", who personally witnessed the incident:—

"In . . . *The Gaucho*, Miss Pickford had elected to act a tiny part, a vision of the Virgin Mary which appeared to the young hero. 'No,' declared one girl

* Many of the clerks in the studios and Hollywood shops compare very favourably with the stars for good looks.

decisively, 'I will always hold, whatever you others may think, that Mary didn't really demean herself by taking that part.' 'Well, I dunno,' replied the other. 'When you think of the kind of money Mary usually gets!'

iv. The Indictment.

Now we begin to see what is wrong with the pickshers. Let us summarise our findings as to films in general, following with a suggested list of the characteristic failings of specified countries. I suppose I need hardly explain that, whereas it is always more interesting if one can quote an instance from an actual film, these instances are given solely because they are representative of a fairly serious fault (and not a trifling inconsistency) common to a number of productions.

From the beginning of the century, readers have been writing to the papers to complain that the heroine, when she entered the room, was wearing a white hat, but on her re-appearance she had black shoes. I fear I have no great patience with these astute discoveries, in which, in any case, the writers frequently over-reached themselves. For instance, it was objected that after Sessue Hayakawa was wounded in the lung, he appeared with his arm in a sling, and that a convict from Dartmoor was played by a man with uncropped hair. Here a little learning was a dangerous thing, as it appears that both practices were correct. On the other hand, no genuine doctor would place his stethoscope as was shewn in many films—against the patient's waistcoat.

Eight telegraph operators from various parts of America found fault with a scene shewing a modern cable office (unaware that it was filmed during actual business at the Western Union Company's establishment), but not a single fan remarked upon an obvious inconsistency in *Queen*

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Christina. The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Company, who kindly furnished me with these two examples, point out that, although they knowingly took this licence in order to comply with story requirements, they were surprised that no-one should have demurred at the apples, bananas and oranges on the Queen's table, in midwinter in seventeenth-century Sweden.

* * *

Hors Concours.

In apparent encouragement of this sleuthing, certain films were prepared with intentional "howlers", the audience being invited to "find the faults". This was simply asking for trouble, as the number of howlers exceeded the studio's wildest expectations. One was reminded of the making-ugly-faces competition at the village fair, and the unfortunate *malentendu* (to say nothing of the box on the ears) when the curate, congratulating an elderly woman on being an easy and unquestioned winner, was indignantly informed that she was not even trying. Similarly, people arriving by car to watch the Brighton Anniversary Run (mentioned in the previous chapter) frequently become quite cross at having to explain that they are NOT competitors. (The run is restricted to cars made before 1905).

* * *

Someone had blundered.

The following are some of the more serious of these anomalies that I have noticed in quite recent days:—

In *Disraeli* (latest talking version) the cab drives up to No. 10, Downing Street in an eastward direction, as though it had come up the steps from St. James' Park. Although the Premier is "Mr. Disraeli", he consistently addresses his wife as "Lady Beaconsfield". It was so in the silent version also, and I have never understood why.

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In a copiously-titled film shewing Ronald Colman with a rôle very similar to Robert Warwick's in *The City of Masks*, a phenomenal "run" at a Continental baccarat-table brings a surge of excited ladies from an adjoining room. On a subsequent visit to the Sporting Club, the hero is lucky again, and *exactly the same women* rush out—*The Man who broke the Bank at Monte Carlo* (20th Century, 1935. Richard Stevens).

In *The Mystery of Mr. X* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1933. Edgar Selwyn), there is a quite realistic Victoria Station, London, but unfortunately the locomotive has a Trans-Atlantic headlight.

Two really bad old-time "howlers":—

A.D.441—how the time flies!—as St. Patrick can ascertain by consulting his handsome wrist-watch—*Life of St. Patrick*.

William Farnum, breaking into the shack which has been deserted for three years, is doubtless cheered to find a lovely fire still burning brightly in the hearth.—*Wolves of the Night*.

Of films in general, the most serious defects may be taken as:—

Tampering with the completed positive.*

Careless indifference as to who should assemble the negative.

Ignorance and violation of the film's true province. Smothering the action with dialogue, than which the Forest of Koumara was not more fatal to maidens. Foolish choice of theme.

The pernicious star system. Encouraging the public to insist upon a love interest in and out of season.

Too many cooks and too little co-operation in the studio.

* Heedless of the mild discouragement offered by Sec. 10, C. F. Act, 1927.

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National characteristics.

If it be the case, as is so often alleged, that American films are technically superior to the English variety, it would be interesting to know the cause of this disparity. Is it the degree of competence of the director? Obviously not, for an American director made *Lloyd of the C.I.D.* in England, and Englishmen directed the American triumphs, *The Four Horsemen*, *Peter Pan*, *Grand Hôtel*.

Is it the nationality of the players? By no means: this tentative theory has long been exploded.

Can the difference rest in the atmosphere of the country itself, the quality of the picture being somehow influenced by native soil? It is difficult to accept such a strange contention, and yet some very poor work has been done by Continental geniuses on their arrival in Hollywood. Leaving this tough problem for the present, let us proceed to some undoubted facts.

U.S.A.

The faults alleged against American films include an occasional tendency to Vulgarity, Ignorance, Sham, Conceit and Hidebound convention; Indifferent technique; Unscrupulous imitation. Our studios, it is said, will lavish disgusting sums upon a fifth-rate ignoramus, and spurn the expert advice of educated people.

At one time American technical methods were good, but now they have fallen somewhat behind current practice. Their present camera work tends to be wild, disconnected, irritating, and they slavishly copy other countries. What could be more absurdly inappropriate than the attempt at Russian and German work in some shots from *Silk Express*?

In a sense the studio hands are individually efficient at their job, but all the operations should be correlated by someone who understands films, and the studios seem unable to supply such a person.

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It is amusingly claimed by one of our paint-sellers that he has made a life-long study of make-up. Unfortunately there is little evidence of this in American films to-day. Since the advent of incandescent lighting, make-up is often very, very poor, and you will see a beautiful girl appearing with a long scar on her cheek, throughout the whole of a 1934 picture.

There is little knowledge of bringing out the individuality of a player's features, by the correct use of brushes (rather than merely dabbing on coloured powders), and although many pretty faces appear, where are to-day's real beauties, like Betty Compson and Corinne Griffith? Miss Griffith herself, let me point out, had a far better knowledge of make-up than obtains in the studios of that topsyturvy colony, where the greatest expert on Orientalism is a Scandinavian—Warner Oland.

(By contrast, an astonishing story is told as to the resourcefulness displayed by the producer of the "Poverty Row" picture *The Salvation Hunters*. There were insufficient funds to meet the salary bill, and a number of the cast left before the film was completed. This now famous director, nothing daunted, utilised the remainder of his players, carefully made-up in exact resemblance to the missing ones!).

Bizet had never been to Spain. Americans will arrange a most costly expedition to Europe, and yet fail even to approach the foreign atmosphere desired, although they may be experts in depicting scenes of the ghetto and the second-hand clothes business. In a comedy picture it is superfluous to have an elaborately correct period setting, but Hollywood will ostentatiously provide this, and widely advertise the enormous expense of it. Then a laughable piece of ignorance will bring the whole thing into ridicule. Just as we are beginning to be impressed with the careful Roman atmosphere of *Roman Scandals**, the Emperor

* U.A., 1933. Frank Tuttle.

Valerius explains that the use of dice is quite unknown to his people!! *Jacta est alea!!!*

When the foreign environment is correctly conveyed, this is generally through a piece of unexpected good luck. Only once have I heard Spanish perfectly spoken in an American talkie, and then it was by a Hungarian girl, in the interesting coloured film *La Cucaracha* (Pioneer, 1935).

¡ La Cucaracha!

¡¡ La Cucaracha!!

¿ Donde se quiere caminar?

What a revelation to hear the words spat out, with fiery Castilian passion, by Fraulein Steffi Duna!

These films are perhaps never more unconsciously diverting than when they seek to portray the lives of the European nobility. We have many times been treated to a close-up of an affable letter from one of these, in the characteristic and unmistakable American hand,* ending "Sincerely, my dear fellow, Duke of Brunswick", and it is stated that in one picture a duke was shewn as wearing his coronet at breakfast. This reminds me that even a total stranger, calling on business at the mansion of an English peer, need not be afraid of arriving at breakfast-time, as he will be immediately introduced into the bosom of the family in the dining-room. Miss N—— S——, in a recent society picture, is apparently under the impression that titled people, on being introduced to fellow-guests, mechanically repeat the name of each person in question—"Sir Jasper!, Mr. Carruthers!"—as they shake hands.

In *Father Brown, Detective* (Paramount, 1934. Edward Sedgwick), a dog is named "Privy Council" by reason of his *having been presented by the Lord Mayor of London*.

Hunting scenes, also, are very amusing, and so is life in the Indian Army.

* As the reader will be aware, it is a beautifully-formed writing, but curiously standardised.

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Then we have—

Over-decoration of women and settings.

Pitiful mis-casting of non-American parts, e.g., heroine of *The Crusades*; supporting players in certain Arliss films.

Using up exteriors to death.

How many times have we seen that same view of the Eiffel Tower, or of the Statue of Liberty or Westminster Bridge? Do comedy cars never skid except at the junction of Western Avenue and Santa Monica Boulevard, and comedians never fall into the water elsewhere than in Westlake Park? The Busch Gardens at Pasadena; the country railway station at Hynes Village; the desert scenes at Guadalupe or Oxnard; the "snow stuff" at Truckee, Nev.—have these places not earned a rest?

England.

British cinematography is distinguished by haphazard and unbusinesslike methods, a fixed inferiority obsession, a puzzling stubbornness in choosing foolish stories, and a hit-or-miss kind of technique.

At the moment, their comedies are quite the best available, but nearly all lack brilliance of cutting, and could be enormously improved.

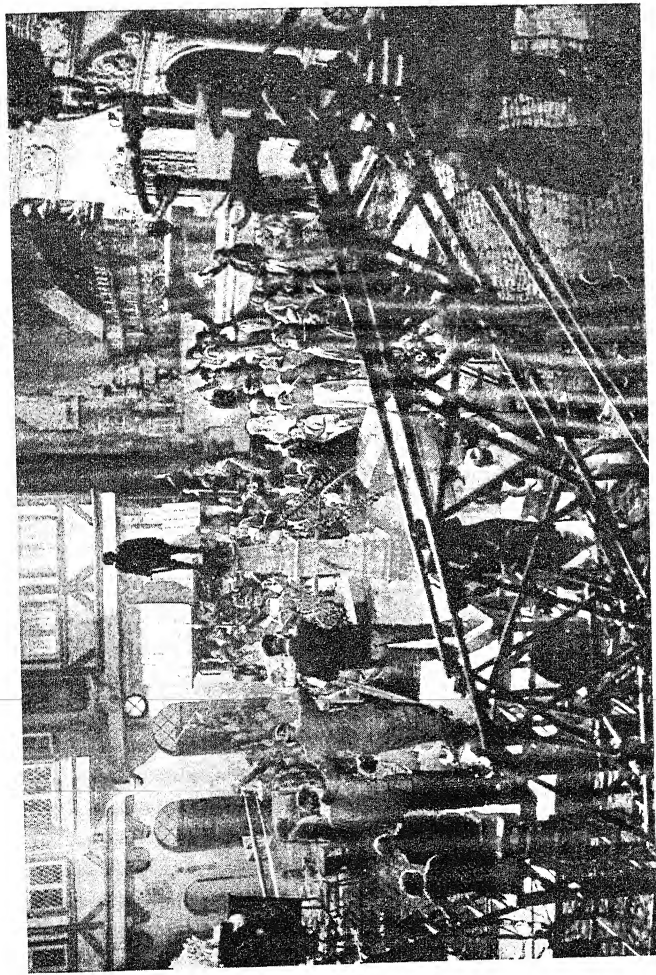
Slavish imitation:—Disastrous copying of stage, music-hall and radiocasting features. Imitation of American successes, such as the singing train in *Monte Carlo*. When they make an admirable sound film like *The Golden Cage**—miles above the American standard—they seem to be almost ashamed of it.

Miscasting and unsuitable dressing.

Poor make-up:—Perfect make-up is impossible on the stage, but films don't try. Insufficient *liaison* between floor and make-up room.

Poor camera-work:—Tracking and panning are defective and jerky. Terrible camera-consciousness and sense of

* Sound City, 1933. Ivar Campbell.



SHEPHERD'S BUSH—"JEW SUSS."

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restriction. Hopeless feeling of cramping when shooting crowd scenes or team dancing. Camera faults admirably illustrated in *Lily of Killarney* (Hagen, 1934. Maurice Elvey). A wretched little village set is photographed again and again — from all three possible positions — and one longs for somebody to put another shilling in the slot towards the expenses of adding a couple more cottages whilst the first two are resting. For five minutes at a time we pitch up and down in a boat on the lake, only nine-tenths of the boat being shewn. It is painfully obvious that a camera is firmly and irrevocably clamped on to the end of the boat, and that we shall never see more than this constant fraction of the complete vessel. Why in blazes couldn't someone cut in a few medium and long shots of the whole boat, taken before the camera was clamped on?

Poor atmosphere:—Americans fail over the atmosphere of foreign settings, but the English cannot represent their own. Over thirty technical mistakes and absurd "howlers" in *Midshipmaid*, although it was supposed to have been made with the co-operation of the Board of Admiralty.

Economy gone mad:—Trying to make a picture with half an omnibus, whereas the recognised minimum scenery is three-quarters of an omnibus. Obvious cotton-wool "snow" in *Turkey Time*. Identical furniture admittedly does service in different scenes in *Race Track* (James Cruze, 1932), but this is rare in America, and much more characteristic of Great Britain. Identical frock worn by Veronica Rose in *Cuckoo in the Nest* (Gaubrit, 1933), subsequently seen worn by Leonora Corbett in an associated company's production of *Wild Boy* (Gainsborough, 1934. de Courville). Peculiar tweed suit worn by Leslie Banks in *Red Ensign* worn also in *Man who Knew too Much* (Gaubrit, 1934. Alfred Hitchcock).

France.

Unpleasant stressing of sex. Love of show.

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Germany.

Very heavy tempo and sense of humour. Wearisome stressing of points (*The Blue Angel*, *Congress Dances*). Too national style.

Sweden.

Gloomy choice of subject. Absence of humour and excitement.

Denmark.

Slightly brighter than the Swedish, but not bright.

Italy.

Splendid acting, but in a national style. To non-Latin countries it appears to be over-acting. Films should try to be international.

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THE MECHANISM OF THE FILM.

i. On certain of the Principles of Cinematography.

Symbolism and silence are the force and beauty of the film. Any attempt at duplicating the realism of the stage is definitely to be avoided, for the film should not deal with things that can be expressed by any other medium.

The stage appeals to both eye and ear, carefully reflecting life (although it cannot ever *be* real life) so that we may be enabled to form our own conclusions, which it cannot greatly influence; but the cinema gives us the raw thought impressions. From the screen we expect symbolically-conveyed Reality, and not realism, and for this reason we shall be well advised to resist the temptations and discount the false claims of stereoscopic or coloured images, or of added dialogue, any of which, so far from increasing realism, will on the contrary reveal the cinema's failure over an impossible task.

In the first place, then, the film *cannot* reproduce the stage, and in the second place there is every reason why it should not make the attempt. The functions of the two arts are quite different, and cannot be too sharply contrasted. How far apart, for instance, are their respective concepts of time, or of space. The stage, although obviously three-dimensional, has in many instances little more than a two-dimensional effect. With the film, things are exactly reversed. The stage reflects a picture of life that is continually going on, proportionately to the unfolding of time, although that time is not necessarily in step with the measure of duration in the outside world.

No one supposes that the staged life has suddenly started or ceased, merely in obedience to the rise or fall of the curtain, and we are quite resigned to the experience that we shall seldom be allowed to witness the beginning or the

end of any of its phases. On the screen, by contrast, we are independent of time, backwards or forwards, and we are justified in concluding that when a concept is no longer mirrored, it has ceased to exist, just as abruptly as it was called out from consciousness.¹ A very interesting inconsistency is shewn in *The Keyhole*, with Miss Kay Francis (Warner, 1933, I believe), to the extent that the process of a girl's complete toilette and change of dress is covered and "matched" by a short speech occupying only a few seconds. Why not? The film is only symbolism.

If movement seems to postulate colour, we must remember that movement and colour in combination require a tri-dimensional image. But stereoscopic cinema is already accomplished, and so is mechanical speech. The product of these allied resources will certainly have ceased to be true film, but can it not attain absolute realism, if this were desirable? The answer is that, as far as we are aware, it cannot. A picture is not necessarily life-like because it is stereoscopic; visible depth would require stereo sound (apparently an impossible achievement), and we cannot use the eye's natural action of discrimination, by focussing, between distant and near objects—the sharpness of definition being already decided on the screen.

"An imaginary depiction of a scene gives more reality in drama than does actual presentation",² but the film's approach to realism has never been inadequate. The sense of sight conveys to us approximately 70 per cent. of our impressions, with information as to number, size, shape, colour, brightness, transparency, reflection, position (including distance and motion) and positional relation. These, therefore, are available to us on the screen, except that we have long learnt to dispense with colour, and that through

1 And yet, of course, if appearance is a form of reality, it must be permanent. This difficult paradox is treated in Bradley's "Appearance and Reality".

2 Eric Elliott—"Anatomy of Motion Picture Art".

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the absence of parallax¹ we have a faulty sense of relative size and distance.

But this latter failing is employed to advantage, to shew the symbolical blotting out of a great concept by an actually trifling one which is nearer in thought. (In case my meaning is not clear.—The portrait of a loved one fills all the scene. The camera moves slightly, and we see a girl in the room—not the girl of the portrait—taking out her tiny jewelled purse. The camera tracks slowly towards the purse, which grows in size until it completely obscures the portrait and everything else.)

“An obvious fake!” people say of some film photography: but no such thing arises in the least (unless they mean that the scene itself is a sham, apart from the photographing of it). All cinema shots are illusory, and there is no more “actual” quality in the most carefully-taken scene than in the deliberate artificiality of Heyl’s dancers in front of the Phasmatrope. Nor is it by any means necessary, though it may be convenient, that players in the same scene should be photographed together, or that they should pose in front of the actual setting which is to be the final background. Such a decision rests with the technicians, and is no concern of the spectator’s.

Whatever *is* shewn must be shewn to the eye, in the screen language already mentioned, but imaginative symbolism is far better than tedious routine thoroughness in depicting, in an uninspired way, every detail possible. The Metro Company once found that a twenty-word sub-title would dispense with 150 scenes, and considerably add to lucidity. The screen should be neither an illustrated book nor a copiously described picture gallery. In *A Woman’s Story*,² with Pina Menichelli and L. Pavanelli, the sequence might have been conveyed less literally and tritely.

1 The test of the nearness of objects—instinctive even in rabbits—by moving the head from side to side

2 *Unione Cinematografica*, 1920

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The noted Italian beauty turns over the pages of her diary, one by one, and after we have read each fresh page, the described events are pictured for us, and then we are shewn another page. One cannot help asking why, if the story is worth filming, it cannot be represented in image, without continual and irritating change of tense. I have selected an early example of a practice which is unduly prevalent to-day.

In *Only Yesterday* (Universal, 1933. Edward Sutherland) the diary is contained in a long letter, which the leading man (John Boles) starts to read. “. . . but to me it seems only yesterday —”, and then the reminiscences start; but we are no longer troubled with a further sight of the letter until the whole story has been shewn, competently but without brilliance, and liable to little more than the general condemnation to-day, that the theme would have been far more dramatic without continual patter.

To resume:—Prosaic literalness betrays ignorance of the screen's resources of symbol. It is said that after a fatal mining disaster, one of the men was detailed to call at the various stricken homes, and break the news as gently as possible. At the door of the first house he asked: “Does the widow Jones live here?”

Thus delicately are many ideas suggested on the screen. This much can be said for the line “Good God! I'm going to have a baby!”, that it is perhaps less liable to confusion of meaning than “Anna leaves for the city with her great secret”*. In an old film of 1919, similar news was conveyed equally clearly, but with delightful reticence, merely by a young woman's reverent glance at Rembrandt's “Madonna and Child”.

Charming restraint of this kind, comparable with Francesca's avowal: *That day we read in its pages no more*, is unflatteringly seldom deemed adequate for to-day's audiences. Little risk of misunderstanding is taken in the subject *Cavalcade* (Fox, 1932. Frank Lloyd). When the

* “‘way Down East”.

mother (Diana Wynyard) receives a telegram, it is already obvious to most of the audience that her son has been killed in action. If I had been directing the picture, I should have thought it amply sufficient, if not superfluous, to insert a close-up of the *first few words* of the telegram: "The Army Council greatly regret . . ." However, the mother succinctly explains to non-intelligent picturegoers that the young man is dead, and falls at full length on the floor. By a close-up view of a clock pendulum in the act of running down, Mr. Adrian Brunel effectively suggests the death of Jack's father in *City of Beautiful Nonsense* (Butcher, 1935).

Emphasis, on the screen, is usually contrived by size and brightness, and although we occasionally meet people who complain of the frequent use of the close-up shot, such objection is incompatible with an understanding of the cinema. According to Mr. R. P. Messel, and I am inclined to agree with him, it springs from an unyieldingly stage outlook which is unable to divorce itself from a perpetually literal and matter-of-fact reading of the screen's symbolic message.

Let us take these three related but really quite distinct concepts:—

- (a) It was the schooner *Hesperus*
- (b) The skipper had taken his little daughter
- (c) Blue were her eyes as the fairy flax

Who can reasonably deny that, although (b) springs from (a), it is a mental image in which we see more of daughter than of skipper, but more of skipper than of schooner? Who can doubt that the progression of thought towards (c) definitely involves concentration upon the attributes of the little girl, which are necessarily magnified in the imagination to an importance which excludes all else? It would be absurd to suppose that investigation of the daughter's eyes would naturally be invited by a vista which prominently included the whole of the schooner.

An alternative to the close-up is the throwing out of

focus, or the total elimination, of all else than the centre of interest. In an early Harold Lloyd picture, Harold looks at a crowd of people in a ballroom. He sees Mildred, and "has eyes for none but her", as we so frequently read. All the other characters fade out, and the room is empty except for Mildred. The device is seen again in *Happy* (B.I.P., 1933), where Stanley Lupino sees no one but Miss Dorothy Hyson in the restaurant.

All knowledge is derived through perception and recognition. So much for perception, in the varying degrees in which it has power to influence us. Recognition in cinema is conveyed by the familiar flash-back. The distinction between simultaneity and sequence of events is obtained by suitable cross-cutting; cessation of thought by the fade-out; quick progression of ideas by the double dissolve; disconnected changes of thought by the clean-cut substitution or wiper dissolve. The quick succession of linked ideas in direct consequence is brilliantly handled as follows, in the subject *Midnight Mary* (Warner, 1933):—

Instead of self-contained rooms or other pieces of separate scenery, the story has a background of a kind of continuous set. When one episode has been shewn, the camera pans to the right or left, whereupon the scene has of course emerged into a different one, in which the same characters are encountered. The camera pans back again (the whole of its traverse being visible, without fade or dissolve), and yet another setting appears, to depict a later stage of the drama.

Amongst quite recent pictures, I recall two clever methods of shewing the forward passage of time. In a scene representing the telephone switchboard of a doctor's surgery, the unfolding of the tale is indicated by the telephonist's replies to callers, and figures super-printed over the picture indicate the passing years—*By Appointment Only* (Invincible, 1933).

We hear the slow, steady ticking of a clock,

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and a large phantom pendulum sweeps rhythmically across the screen, wiping away the record of previous events, and ushering in those that follow with time's progress (? a Warner Bros. film?).

11. *The Talking Film and its Problems.*

We are indebted to no less an authority on æsthetics than Mr. Jesse Lasky, author of the impartially international survey of films in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, for the pronouncement that moving pictures, since the advent of dialogue, are "more of an art than ever before".*

Until I read this recently, I had fallen into the trap of assuming quite the contrary, and I believe the delusion is still hugged by a good many thinking writers, such as Paul Rotha, R. P. Messel, F. A. Talbot, Rudolf Arnheim and Filson Young. Just through sheer cussedness, I propose to finish this chapter as it would have been written if I had not seen the light.

* * *

The Sound Habit.

Very many people typical of the man in the street, wearied with the eternal and yearly-increasing noise of that street, found the comparatively calm and silent cinema a restful and soothing entertainment. There are times when one appreciates a relief from incessant chatter.

Strictly speaking, a film can be understood and enjoyed in absolute silence, but it has long been customary to emphasise its moods with selected music. Apart from the agreeable asset of such music, on certain occasions other sounds and incidental noises can be employed without definitely bad effect, although it is easy to fall into abuse of this resource. At any rate, there were many presumed sounds which we were quite willing to leave to the imagination, and I remember that my brother-in-law, who had

* Preface to an American book.

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accompanied me to see Fox's *If Winter Comes*, gave thanks for present blessings when an enormous close-up of a roaring baby filled the screen.

There is much to be said for the optical reproduction of a standard musical accompaniment to a picture, splendidly played under special supervision at the studio, but we have to face words—not facts—and in this chapter my remarks will be chiefly directed to the now universal craze for mechanical speech, without giving detailed attention to the important separate aspects of the true sound film (whose possibilities can hardly be developed in the presence of all-pervading dialogue).

This yearning for audible evidence is a curious thing. We do not require to have a view of the members of an orchestra, and in fact it is quite usual to shut the eyes when listening to music. (In the presence of some American roaries, of course, we vainly shut everything). But it has been a growing obsession for many years, probably owing its origin to the sense of incompleteness caused by a silent film which seeks to shew a performance of music. The Gilbert and Sullivan operas were filmed with music and words in 1902 (although it is illegal to present these productions in public), and Flotow's "Martha" in 1906, just before Lauste had discovered the sound-on-film method—and so we go on until, by various stages of experiment, we reach *The Singing Fool* and *The Lights of New York*.*

Once we have acquired the sound habit, we subscribe to the fallacy that a certain life-like quality is missing in silent pictures. I know how stupid this habit is, for I am enchained by it myself, and feel quite unable to shave in my bathroom if some loud noise drowns the accustomed slight sound of the razor (and yet no one shaves by ear).

An ill-matched pair.

Although the camera is fundamentally unsuited to making a dramatic record in conjunction with the voice,

* The first all-talking film.

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of course this can be contrived after a fashion, just as the citizens of Lagado selected marble for softening to make pillows and pin-cushions. Dialogue is NOT an additional resource, however—far from it, and in fact it infallibly lessens the scope and force of the camera. In true cinematography, the black-and-white photograph is an effective artistic transcription of life in the solid and multi-coloured outside world, and to be in agreement, the sound should be no more than transcribed also.

A mechanical reproduction of voices makes the whole thing a fake, and "all sham is bad art".¹ Moreover, the actual sound distracts attention from the miming, whereas the attributes or effect of the sound could appropriately be studied by eye alone. The perception of the scent of "Heliotrope" forms one of the most dramatic moments in the film of that name. Surely it would never occur to a spectator that he must, in addition, be allowed actually to smell the heliotrope?

It is useless to press for symbolism when dialogue makes its lame attempt at imitating realism, and the soft-focus close-up is a good example of this futility. In general, it would be a quite acceptable convention to shew hard and clear close-ups of a stern man, contrasted with soft ones of a frail woman, as for instance, in *Riptide*.² But if Miss Norma Shearer and Mr. Herbert Marshall insist on talking aloud, they strive for prosaic matter-of-factness, with which, I am afraid, symbolism is quite inconsistent.

In the slavishly-copied stage we can easily isolate the voices of the different players, but on the screen there is, of course, no directional sense, so that the voices can be no more than suggested as coming from such-and-such a player, as is the case with the ventriloquist's puppet. This is evident to any serious student, and hence a number of writers have pointed out that a correct talking picture must consist of nothing but close-ups. It will also be evident

¹ C. H. Bothamley—"Ilford Manual of Photography"

² M.G.M., 1933. Edmund Goulding.

that any attempt at continuous dialogue is utterly incompatible with the rhythmic and contrasted cross-cutting which is the valuable secret of true film.

For and Against.

I have no wish to suggest that talking and singing films are of no value, but it is surely an unfortunate consequence that, with the arrival of talkies, pure cinema must be almost banished from the screen.

To add to the apparent inconsistencies of this book, I have admittedly made favourable comment on several talking pictures; but what incident of drama would not have been more dramatic in true film: what humorous situation could not have been at least equalled? In many a recent talkie we have welcomed both the restfulness and the force of a wordless sequence: dramatic episodes in *Mary Stevens, M.D.* and *The Golden Cage*, the splendid thrill in *Gallant Fool*, moments in comedies, such as *Three-Cornered Moon* and *Falling for You*. Film dialogue cannot possibly be timed to allow for laughs; but in any case, what could be funnier than to *see* the would-be chorus-girl singing in *Aunt Sally*, just as we saw Max Linder's fiancée singing in the old comedy already mentioned? Indeed, it would have been more in keeping with the present-day trend to humane methods of dispatch, and a much-appreciated kindness, if we could have been spared the actual sound of her voice (as cleverly conveyed by Miss Cicely Courtneidge), of which we were fully able to judge by its effect on the dog.

Our bitter disappointment on hearing Miss Mary Pickford in *Coquette*,¹ the violent headaches caused by early roaries—these unpleasant experiences are already half-forgotten, and we are nearly reconciled to hearing players talk about “toon”, “reely” and “woopee”. Mr. Fred Astaire relates² a story of a young fledgling of the stage

¹ U.A., 1929. Sam Taylor.

² to the “News-Chronicle,” London.

who, enquiring in delighted mock-modesty as to a girl's reasons for wanting his autograph, received the explanation that, having seen him act, she was interested to know whether he could write. Similarly, many of us must have wondered whether the screen stars could speak.

Now we know, and this is one of the benefits of the talking picture. Other advantages are that the spectators can now be called "audience", and that these pictures are suitable for the entirely illiterate.

On the other hand, there is the disadvantage to the deaf, for whom the film now hardly makes sense without words. "Why *without*?" an objector asks, spitefully quoting the "What change?" incident. (*Voi lo sapete*—you know the story. A temperance lecturer is holding forth. "Take my own case," he pleads. "Ten years ago I was a hopeless, doddering wreck; a burden to myself and an object of repulsion and ridicule to everyone else. What has brought about this change?")

Then some idiot from the back calls out: "What change?")

Yes, I admit they have improved enormously, but even so . . .

It will be recalled that in a P. G. Wodehouse story an ignorant man referred to a family as "Ffoulkes", when the name should have been pronounced "ffoulkes", a blunder which was instantly detected by the sensitive ear of the Baronet. Despite a Continental upbringing, I fear I was unable to perceive the finer shades of difference when the languages instructor in *Song of Songs* was demonstrating the right and wrong pronunciation of *suprême*.

But even if the sound were perfect, we should yet be faced with the fact that the roar is "neither fish nor chips" (old English saying), and that the words are not susceptible of alliance with true dramatic image. Notwithstanding the careful and very ingenious synchronisation of words in sound and lip-movement, the dialogue will still

be as much as four frames "out of sync" to listeners in the rear seats of a big theatre like the Roxy, and a variance of only two frames produces a curious uncomfortable feeling that the voices are detached and wandering. Only absolute timing will convey the illusion that the ventriloquist's doll can talk.

Whilst "pure" roarie is bad enough, the attempt to convert an existing silent film is going from Scilly to Coreopsis. Such films were taken at the speed originally proposed by the Lumières, and generally adopted as being ideal, namely, sixteen frames per second. A correct rendering of certain consonants, it appears, cannot be secured at a lower speed than twenty-four frames per second (assuming the usual sound-on-film method is adopted).

Therefore, not only does the silent film acquire a horrible jerkiness by reason of the elimination of its sub-titles, but the action is fifty per cent. too fast, and a small slice has to be masked off from the left-hand side of the picture (quite sufficient to upset the balance of careful artistic composition). To crown this ritual of mutilation, an artificial dialogue is "dubbed on", and I can assure readers that it fits where it touches, and that's all.

I recently had the pleasure of seeing Conrad Weine's *Viennese Waltz*—in which, of course, the characters were speaking German—made into an English talkie directed by "Charles Viner, Esq."!!

However, this is typical of the many ills that film is heir to, for which I have endeavoured to enlist the reader's sympathy.

NOTES.

Page 90—"Oyster Bars Jam Probe." It appears that Oyster was the name of a Traffic Commissioner who had refused to sanction a proposed enquiry ("probe") into the causes of street congestion ("jam").

Page 250—"Koumara." Upon setting foot in the forbidden grounds of the bachelor god Kartikeya, maidens were instantly transformed into *lhana* (tropical creeper), which of course hampered their style.

* * *

The valuable photos of the late William Friese-Greene, the late Max Linder and *The Great Train Robbery* very kindly lent by (respectively) Claude Friese-Greene; the Editor of "The Picturegoer"; Miss Iris Barry, curator at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The portraits of Chrissie White and Henry Edwards, Constance Worth, Gloria Stuart and Gibb McLaughlin very kindly supplied to the author by the artist in each instance. (In the case, however, of Chrissie White and Henry Edwards, who appear to be quite unchanged since old Hepworth days, the purpose is equally well and interestingly served by substituting a scene which happens to have been made within the last two years, from British and Dominions' *General John Regan*).

For the shot from *The Queen's Affair*, of which no still was available, the author was fortunate in obtaining the services of Miss Stella Martin, the art designer associated with the décor of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon. Her sketch, based on a description, closely reproduces the incident contemplated, and is offered with acknowledgments to the British and Dominions Film Corporation.

The group in Plate II, the landscape from *I take this Woman* (Pl. XXIII), the portraits of William S. Hart,

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Rodolpho Valentino, ZaSu Pitts (in *Finn and Hattie*) and Marlene Dietrich (in *Song of Songs*) collected after a very obliging search by three separate offices of Paramount Pictures.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer were good enough to furnish the rare illustrations in Pl. XXVI (a setting from *Ben Hur* and the haunting desolation of *Greed*), the two scenes in Pl. XX (Eleanor Boardman in *The Great Meadow*; Norma Shearer and John Gilbert in *He who gets slapped*), and the portrait of Greta Garbo.

Radio Pictures doubtless "proudly present" their notable star, Katharine Hepburn, and United Artists (including D. W. Griffith and Samuel Goldwyn) have assisted in the matter of Anna Sten, Lyda Roberti, and the scene showing the late Clarine Seymour, Richard Barthelmess and Creighton Hale in *Idol Dancer*.

Pl. XXI shews a scene from *Master of Men*, supplied, together with Western views, by Columbia Pictures.

I am indebted to Universal Pictures for portraits of Helen Chandler and Lon Chaney. They also submitted two of the Western scenes, and several camera studies by Freulich of their stars Gloria Stuart and Margaret Sullavan, and were exceedingly helpful.

Pl. XXXI represents the City Ways of Everytown, 100 years hence, and hails from London Film Productions.

The Gaumont-British Corporation came forward with the studio scene during the making of *Jew Süss*; Nova Pilbeam, the young "Lady Jane Grey" of *Tudor Rose* (Pl. XIII), and *eighteen* studies of Veronica Rose.

All other illustrations were kindly lent by Messrs. Odham's Press, owners of the "Kinematograph Weekly" and "Picturegoer" library of cinema illustrations.

Further acknowledgment is due to the helpful advice of Mr. O. J. Robinson, Art Editor of *Nash's* and *Cosmopolitan*.

THE END.

